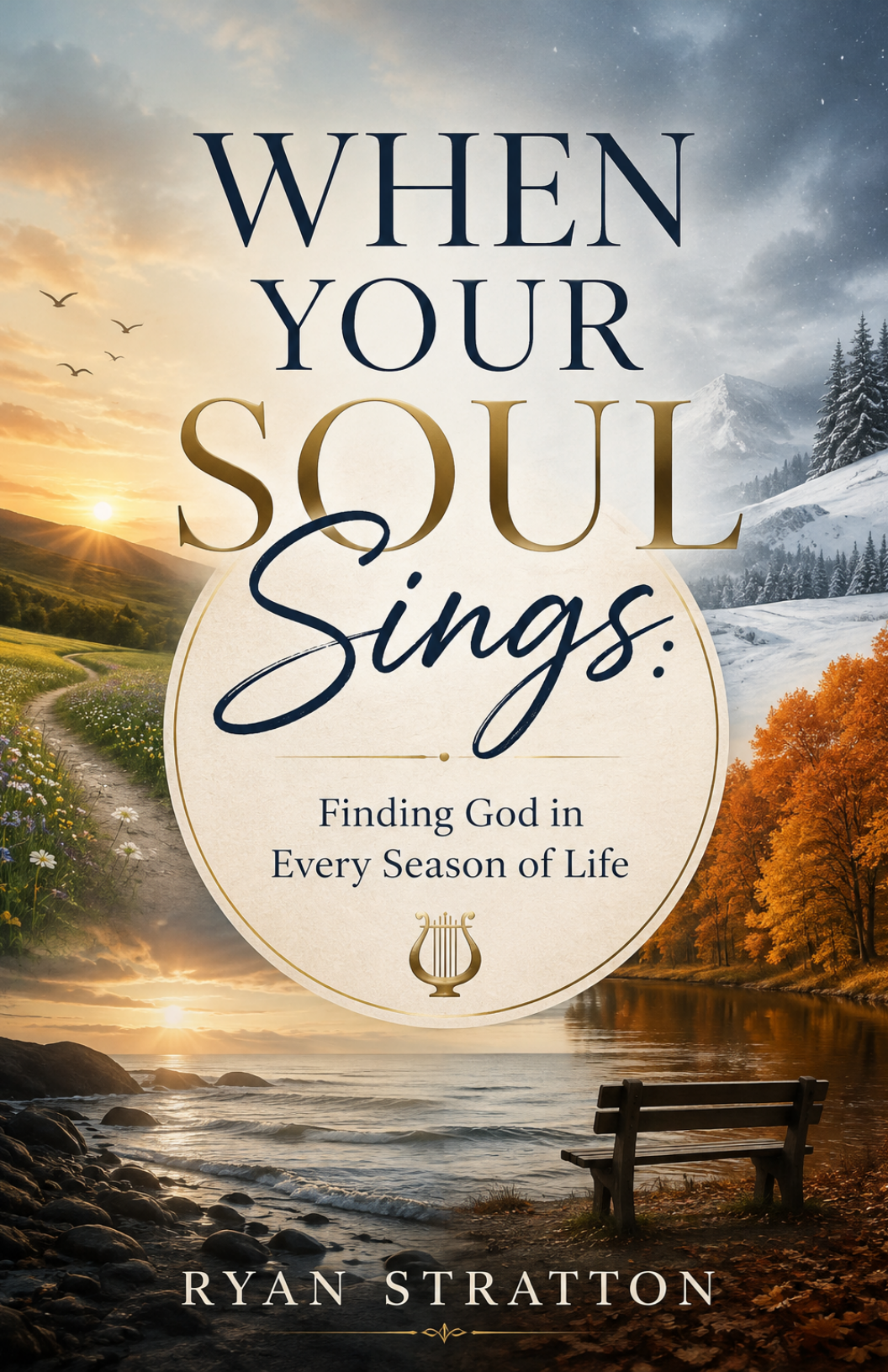




WHEN YOUR SOUL *Sings.*

Finding God in
Every Season of Life



RYAN STRATTON

A small decorative flourish or ornament centered below the author's name.

When Your Soul Sings

Ryan
Stratton

WHEN YOUR SOUL SINGS

Finding God in Every Season of Life

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This book grew from a sermon series and is offered in the hope that the Psalms will help God's people bring every season of life into God's presence.

Ryan Stratton, 2026

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I dedicate this book to all who are searching to find God in all seasons and circumstances of life. May you know His presence with you today and always.

Learning to Sing Again

There is a song for every season of life.

There are songs we sing when everything is going well. Songs of celebration. Songs of gratitude. Songs that seem to rise effortlessly from our hearts.

There are also songs we sing through tears. Songs whispered in hospital rooms. Songs prayed beside fresh graves. Songs offered when the future feels uncertain and God seems silent.

Most of us have experienced both.

Life has a way of moving from mountaintops to valleys and back again. Some days our faith feels strong and confident. Other days we wonder if God hears our prayers at all. We celebrate births and mourn losses. We experience unexpected blessings and heartbreaking disappointments. We carry victories one season and burdens the next.

The beautiful thing about the Psalms is this: God has already given us words for every one of those moments.

For generations, believers have turned to the Psalms when they did not know what else to say. They have prayed them

in times of joy and sorrow, in seasons of confidence and seasons of doubt. The Psalms remind us that God welcomes the whole of our lives. We do not have to hide our fears, silence our questions, or pretend we have everything together before coming into His presence.

That may be one of the greatest gifts the Psalms offer us.

Too often we think faithful people should always sound joyful. Yet the Bible's own prayer book tells a different story. It contains songs of praise and songs of protest. There are hymns celebrating God's majesty alongside prayers asking, "How long, O Lord?" There are declarations of confidence standing beside cries of desperation. The Psalms teach us that honest faith is not weak faith. Honest faith brings everything before God.

This book grew out of a sermon series preached during the summer of 2026. As I prepared each week, I found myself returning again and again to one simple truth: the Psalms are not merely meant to be studied. They are meant to be prayed, sung, and lived.

That realization changed the way I approached these ancient poems.

The Hebrew title for the book of Psalms is *Tehillim*, meaning "Praises." At first, that seems surprising because so many of the Psalms are filled with grief, questions, confession, and lament. Yet perhaps that is exactly the

point. Biblical praise is not pretending life is easy. It is choosing to bring every part of life before the God who is faithful.

The Psalms served as the prayer book and hymnbook of Israel for centuries. They accompanied pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem, priests leading worship in the Temple, kings being crowned, families celebrating festivals, and exiles longing for home. They gave voice to an entire nation learning to walk with God through every imaginable circumstance.

Collected over many centuries, the Psalter bears witness to the faith of God's people across generations. Many psalms are associated with David, the shepherd who became king, but others were written by Asaph, the sons of Korah, Solomon, Moses, Ethan, and anonymous worshipers whose names have been forgotten even though their prayers continue to shape the people of God.

The Psalms are intentionally arranged into five books, echoing the five books of Moses. They begin with an invitation to delight in God's instruction and trust His Anointed King. They end with an explosion of praise as every living thing is invited to worship the Lord. Between those bookends lies the entire landscape of the human soul.

One reason the Psalms continue to speak across cultures and generations is that they never reduce faith to ideas

alone. They are poetry. Hebrew poetry does not rely on rhyme as much as it relies on vivid images, parallel thoughts, rhythm, and repetition. The Psalms do more than explain truth. They help us feel it. They awaken our imagination, shape our prayers, and teach our hearts how to respond to God.

As I have grown in my own walk with Christ, I have become increasingly convinced that spiritual maturity is not found in avoiding difficult emotions. It is found in bringing every emotion into the presence of God. The Psalms give us permission to rejoice without guilt, grieve without shame, confess without fear, and hope without losing heart.

They also point us to Jesus.

No book of the Old Testament is quoted more often in the New Testament than the Psalms. Jesus prayed the Psalms throughout His earthly ministry. He sang them with His disciples. He quoted them from the cross. The early church understood that the Psalms not only described the experiences of Israel's kings, but also pointed forward to the coming Messiah. As we read them today, we discover that every song ultimately finds its deepest meaning in Christ.

As a Wesleyan Christian, I also hear another melody running throughout the Psalms. I hear the grace of God continually pursuing His people. I see hearts being transformed through repentance, worship, and trust. I see

believers growing in holiness as they learn to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. The Psalms remind us that sanctification is not merely learning new ideas. It is allowing our hearts to be reshaped by the presence of God until our lives begin to sing His praise.

That is my prayer for this book.

This is not intended to be a technical commentary or an academic study of Hebrew poetry. There are many excellent resources that serve those purposes, and I have leaned heavily on the work of faithful scholars such as James L. Mays, Walter Brueggemann, Tremper Longman III, the *Feasting on the Word* commentary series, the IVP *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, and others whose careful work has enriched my understanding of Scripture. My goal is much simpler.

I want to help you meet God.

Together we will walk through six Psalms that speak into six seasons every believer eventually experiences: wonder, trust, gratitude, longing, waiting, and joyful surrender to our King. Along the way, I hope you will discover that these ancient songs are not relics of another age. They are living prayers for today.

My prayer is that somewhere in these pages you will recognize your own story. You may find yourself standing in awe of God's creation. You may be struggling to trust

Him. You may be longing for His presence, waiting for an answer, or discovering once again the beauty of King Jesus.

Whatever season you find yourself in, there is a Psalm that can become your prayer.

And as you learn to pray these songs, perhaps your own soul will begin to sing again.

1

Discovering Your Place in God's Story Psalm 8

There is something sacred about looking up.

Not glancing upward as you hurry from the car into the house. Not noticing the weather before rushing to the next appointment. I mean really looking up.

Some of my favorite moments happen outside.

Sometimes it is early in the morning as the first light stretches across the horizon. Sometimes it is late at night when the world finally grows quiet. The wind moves gently through the trees. The sounds of traffic fade into the distance. Above me is an ocean of stars scattered across the black canvas of the sky.

I never seem to tire of it. Every time I stop long enough to notice, I am reminded of two truths. God is incredibly big. And I am incredibly small.

That may sound discouraging at first, but it is actually one of the most freeing discoveries we can make.

Our world constantly tells us to think bigger about ourselves. Build your platform. Make your name known. Leave your mark. Become someone important. We spend enormous amounts of time trying to convince ourselves and everyone around us that we are larger than life.

Yet life has a way of gently correcting that illusion.

A phone call from the doctor's office. The loss of a job. A child who wanders from the faith. A marriage under strain. The death of someone we love.

Moments like these remind us that we are not nearly as strong as we imagined. There are circumstances we cannot fix. Questions we cannot answer. Burdens we cannot carry by ourselves. If we are honest, every one of us eventually comes to the end of ourselves.

King David knew that feeling.

Before he ever wrote these words, he had lived a remarkable life. He had defeated giants, led armies, survived betrayal, and sat on Israel's throne. Yet when

Psalm 8 begins, none of those accomplishments seem to matter.

Instead of looking at himself, David looks up.

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

The psalm begins where all true worship begins.

Not with us.

With God.

David’s eyes are drawn toward the heavens. He sees the moon hanging in the darkness. He watches the stars scattered across the sky. Every point of light reminds him that the God he worships is the Creator of everything he can see and even more that he cannot.

Then David says something remarkable.

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established...”

The work of your fingers.

Pause there for a moment.

The stars that leave us speechless. The galaxies scientists continue to discover. The breathtaking beauty of creation

that stretches beyond human imagination. David says they are the work of God's fingers.

Scripture does not describe God straining beneath the weight of creation. He does not labor or struggle. The universe that overwhelms us required no effort from Him at all.

The heavens are finger work. That single phrase reshapes our perspective.

The problems that feel impossible to us are never too large for the God who spoke the universe into existence.

David continues by asking one of the greatest questions in all of Scripture. "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"

The Hebrew words are even more vivid.

The first word is *enosh*. It emphasizes our frailty, our weakness, our mortality. Dust that breathes for a little while.

The second phrase literally means "son of Adam."

Earth-born.

Dust-made.

Fragile creatures fashioned from the ground.

David looks at the heavens and asks, “Why would the Creator of galaxies concern Himself with fragile dirt creatures like us?”

That question still echoes in every human heart.

Why does my life matter? Why would God notice me? Why would the Lord of heaven care about someone as ordinary as I am?

Those are not signs of weak faith. They are deeply human questions.

And Psalm 8 offers a breathtaking answer.

David does not leave the question hanging. He answers it almost as quickly as he asks it.

“Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.”

There is one word that captures the heart of those verses.

Crowned.

Can you picture it?

Fragile dirt creatures...wearing a crown. Weak people...bearing glory. Ordinary men and women...honored by the Creator of the universe. David is not saying humanity earned this honor. He is saying God freely gave it.

That changes everything.

Most of us spend our lives trying to earn significance. We work harder. We achieve more. We chase promotions, possessions, recognition, and applause, hoping that if we accomplish enough, we will finally believe our lives matter.

The problem is that enough is never enough. There is always another mountain to climb. Another goal to reach. Another person to impress. Our culture tells us that our worth is something we create.

Scripture tells us our worth is something we receive.

Long before you accomplished anything...God delighted in you. Long before you had a career...a family...a title...or a reputation...God declared your life valuable.

That is not because of what you have done. It is because of whose image you bear.

Psalm 8 reaches back to the opening pages of Genesis. When God created humanity, He said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion..."

Human beings were never created simply to occupy space on earth. We were created to reflect the character of God.

Like mirrors catching the sunlight, our lives were designed to reflect His goodness into the world. That is what it means to bear God's image.

It means we were created to love as He loves. To care as He cares. To create. To cultivate. To protect. To serve. To steward His creation with wisdom and humility.

Notice the language David uses. "You have given them dominion over the works of your hands."

Dominion is one of those words that has been misunderstood. Some hear it and think control. Others think power. Still others think permission to use creation however we please. But biblical dominion looks nothing like exploitation.

God's rule is never selfish. His authority always serves. His power always seeks what is good.

If humanity is created in His image, then our dominion should reflect His character. We were never called to dominate. We were called to steward. There is a world of difference between those two ideas.

A steward understands that nothing ultimately belongs to them. Everything has been entrusted to their care.

That changes how we see the world.

The earth is not ours to consume. It is God's gift for us to cultivate. People are not obstacles to overcome or resources to use. They are image bearers to honor. Leadership is not about climbing over others. It is about lifting others up.

This is why Psalm 8 is far more than a song about creation. It is a song about purpose.

Every human heart longs to know why it is here. Children ask it. Teenagers wrestle with it. Adults chase it. Older adults reflect on it.

Why am I here? What difference does my life make?

Psalm 8 answers with remarkable simplicity.

You were created to reflect the glory of God wherever He has placed you. That calling is not reserved for pastors, missionaries, or people with extraordinary gifts. It belongs to every follower of Christ.

A teacher reflects God's wisdom in the classroom. A mechanic reflects God's creativity by repairing what is broken. A mother reflects God's nurturing love as she cares for her children. A retiree reflects God's faithfulness by investing in younger generations. A student reflects God's goodness by treating classmates with kindness and integrity.

Every vocation becomes holy when it is offered back to God. Every act of faithfulness becomes an act of worship.

Yet if we are honest, something inside us knows the world is no longer the way it was meant to be.

We do not have to watch the evening news for very long to realize that. Wars continue. Children suffer. Relationships fracture. Greed often triumphs over generosity. Power is abused. The weak are overlooked. Creation itself bears the scars of human sin.

If humanity has been crowned with glory and honor, why does the world so often look dishonorable?

The answer takes us back to another garden.

In Eden, humanity chose autonomy over trust. Instead of receiving life from God, Adam and Eve reached for control. Instead of reflecting God's goodness, they tried to replace Him. The crown was never removed.

But it was bent.

Sin distorted what God had created to be beautiful. Dominion slowly became domination. Stewardship became exploitation. Love became selfishness. The image of God remained, but it was cracked. Every one of us has inherited that brokenness.

We see it in the world.

And if we are honest, we see it in ourselves. There are moments when I wish I always reflected God's character perfectly.

There are days I wish my words were always gracious. My motives always pure. My patience always complete. But they are not. The longer I walk with Christ, the more aware I become of how deeply I need His grace.

Perhaps you feel the same way.

That is why Psalm 8 does not simply point us backward to creation. It quietly prepares us for Someone who would come and restore what humanity had broken.

If Psalm 8 ended with humanity's failure, it would still be beautiful. But it would also be heartbreaking. We would know what we were created to be, yet remain painfully aware of what we have become.

Thankfully, David's song is not the end of the story.

Centuries after David wrote these words, the writer of Hebrews opened Psalm 8 again. He saw something the first readers could only glimpse. He realized that David's words were pointing beyond humanity as a whole. They were pointing to one particular Man.

Listen to how Hebrews reflects on Psalm 8: "Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their

control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus..." (Hebrews 2:8-9)

Those words have always captured my attention. "We do not yet see...but we do see Jesus."

That is the story of the Christian life.

We do not yet see a world without war. But we do see Jesus. We do not yet see an end to disease. But we do see Jesus. We do not yet see every relationship healed. But we do see Jesus. We do not yet see justice fully established. But we do see Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews refuses to ignore reality. He acknowledges that creation is still groaning. Humanity still struggles. Sin still wounds. Death still hurts. We do not yet see the world as it was meant to be. But that is not the only thing we see. We see Jesus.

Everything Psalm 8 hoped humanity would become is fulfilled in Him. Jesus is the true image bearer.

Where Adam grasped for equality with God, Jesus humbled Himself. Where humanity sought power, Jesus chose service. Where we have often loved ourselves first, Jesus loved the Father completely and His neighbors perfectly.

He became the faithful human we could never become on our own.

There is another contrast in Psalm 8 that becomes even more beautiful when we read it through the lens of the Gospel.

David stood beneath the stars in amazement. He looked at the heavens and called them “the work of your fingers.” I love that image. The galaxies. The planets. The oceans. The mountains. The intricate beauty of every living thing. Finger work.

Creation itself required nothing more than the effortless power of God. Then something astonishing happened.

The God whose fingers scattered stars across the universe stepped into His own creation. The Creator became a baby. The One who measured the heavens allowed Himself to be wrapped in swaddling cloths. The hands that formed Adam from the dust were held by Mary as she taught her Son to walk.

Think about that for a moment.

The One who painted sunsets learned to use a hammer in Joseph’s workshop. The One who designed the human hand now possessed one. Those hands touched lepers no one else would touch. They lifted children into His arms. They broke bread with sinners. They washed the dusty feet of His disciples. They calmed storms. They opened blind eyes. They blessed the broken. Then those same hands were stretched wide upon a Roman cross.

When I think about Psalm 8, I cannot escape one simple truth.

The heavens required only God's fingers. But redemption required His pierced hands. That is how much you matter to God.

David wondered why the Creator would even notice fragile, dust-born people. The cross is God's answer. He did more than notice us. He came for us. He entered our weakness. He carried our sorrow. He bore our sin. He conquered our death.

Sometimes people ask, "How much is a person worth?" The Gospel answers that question more clearly than anything else ever could. Your worth is not measured by your accomplishments.

It is not determined by your income, your education, your appearance, or your success. Your worth is measured by the price Jesus was willing to pay to redeem you. He considered you worth His life. That does not make us important because of who we are. It reveals the immeasurable depth of God's love.

Grace has always worked that way. God's love is never a reward for our goodness. It is the reason we can become new. Long before we reached for Him, He was reaching for us. Long before we thought to ask for mercy, mercy had already begun moving toward us.

That is the beautiful rhythm of grace. God always takes the first step.

Because of Christ, the story of humanity does not end with a cracked image. The Holy Spirit begins restoring what sin has distorted. Day by day, grace reshapes us. Our hearts become softer. Our love grows deeper. Our lives begin reflecting Jesus more clearly.

This is not something we accomplish by trying harder. It is the work of God's Spirit within us.

The more we surrender to Christ, the more His image is formed in us. One day, that work will be complete.

The brokenness we now experience will finally give way to wholeness. Creation itself will be renewed. The crown that has been bent by sin will be fully restored. The true King will reign forever, and all who belong to Him will share in His glorious kingdom.

Until that day, we continue looking to Jesus. When life feels uncertain, we look to Jesus. When shame whispers that we are not enough, we look to Jesus. When suffering clouds our vision, we look to Jesus. When we forget who we are, we look to Jesus.

Because whenever we lose sight of Him, we eventually lose sight of ourselves. It is only in the face of Christ that we discover what it truly means to be human.

So what does Psalm 8 look like on a Tuesday morning?

How do we carry this ancient song into our ordinary lives? I think it begins with something David understood well. We have to learn to look up again. That sounds almost too simple. Yet I wonder if one of the greatest spiritual challenges of our generation is that we have forgotten how to be amazed.

We live surrounded by distractions. Our phones buzz. Our calendars stay full. The news cycle never seems to stop. Even when we find a quiet moment, we instinctively reach for another screen. Our attention is constantly pulled downward. David invites us to lift our eyes.

Not because the stars themselves have the answers, but because they remind us of the One who does.

The next time you find yourself overwhelmed, step outside. Leave your phone inside. Stand still for a few minutes. Look at the sunrise. Watch the clouds drift across the sky. If it is nighttime, look at the stars.

Breathe deeply.

Listen to the quiet.

Then remember whose world you are standing in.

Remember who spoke it into existence. Remember who holds it together. And remember that the same God who knows every star by name also knows yours.

Wonder has a way of putting life back into perspective. Our problems may still be real. Our grief may not disappear. The diagnosis may not suddenly change.

But when we remember how great God is, our burdens no longer have the final word. The problem is no longer bigger than our God.

Wonder gives birth to worship. Worship gives birth to trust. Trust gives birth to peace. That is why looking up is not escaping reality. It is remembering reality.

There is another invitation hidden inside Psalm 8.

It is the invitation to see people differently.

David reminds us that every human being has been crowned with glory and honor. Think about what that means.

Every person you pass at the grocery store. Every coworker. Every child running across a playground. Every elderly person sitting quietly in a nursing home. Every refugee. Every prisoner. Every addict. Every person sleeping beneath a bridge. Every executive sitting in the corner office. Every neighbor. Every stranger. Every one of them bears the image of God.

Some images have been scarred by sin. Some have been buried beneath years of pain. Some have forgotten their own worth. But the image is still there.

When we begin seeing people the way God sees them, it becomes much harder to dismiss them, stereotype them, or use them for our own purposes.

Love begins with seeing. Jesus never walked into a crowd and saw interruptions. He saw people. He saw names. He saw stories. He saw hurts. He saw possibilities.

If we are becoming more like Christ, we will begin seeing people differently too. Perhaps the greatest mission field many of us will ever enter is not across the ocean. It is the grocery store. The office. The classroom. The neighborhood. The dinner table. Wherever people are, image bearers are waiting to be loved.

Psalm 8 also reshapes how we think about stewardship.

When God gave humanity dominion over creation, He was not handing us permission to exploit the world. He was inviting us to care for what belongs to Him. That includes creation itself. It also includes our gifts. Our resources. Our influence. Our time. Even our bodies. Everything we have is ultimately a gift entrusted to us by God.

A steward asks a different question than an owner. An owner asks, "What can I do with what belongs to me?" A

steward asks, “Lord, how would You have me care for what already belongs to You?” That one question has the power to transform every area of life.

Our families become gifts to nurture. Our homes become places of hospitality. Our churches become communities of grace. Our neighborhoods become mission fields. Our work becomes an act of worship.

Everything changes when we remember whose world this really is.

One part of Psalm 8 has always challenged me in a personal way.

David writes, “Out of the mouths of infants and children you have established strength...”

That seems backwards. Wouldn’t God choose kings? Generals? Scholars? The wealthy? The influential?

Yet throughout Scripture, God delights in working through those the world often overlooks. A shepherd boy defeats a giant. A young girl becomes the mother of the Messiah. Fishermen become apostles. Children become examples of faith. The crucified Savior becomes the risen King. God’s strength is often revealed through human weakness.

That gives me hope.

Because I know my own weaknesses. I know my limitations. I know the moments when I feel inadequate for the calling God has placed before me.

Maybe you do too.

The good news is that God has never been looking for people who have everything together. He is looking for people who are willing to trust Him. The Apostle Paul would later write, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

That is not a New Testament idea. It has been God’s way all along.

When we finally admit that we cannot do everything ourselves, we make room for the Holy Spirit to do what only He can do. The Christian life was never meant to be lived by our own strength. The Holy Spirit empowers us to become the people God created us to be.

He teaches us to love what Jesus loves. He gives us strength when our own strength runs out. He convicts us when we wander. He comforts us when we grieve. He transforms us little by little into the likeness of Christ. That transformation is one of the greatest miracles of grace.

The person I am today is not the person I was years ago. I still have a long way to go. There are still places where God

is shaping me. Still attitudes He is refining. Still lessons He is teaching. But by His grace, I am not who I once was.

That same grace is available to you.

Psalm 8 begins and ends with the same declaration: “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.”

Everything between those two verses is meant to lead us back to worship. David begins with God’s majesty. He ends with God’s majesty.

That is no accident.

The more we understand ourselves, the more we worship Him. The more we see His greatness, the more secure we become in His love. Humility and confidence grow together in the life of faith. Humility reminds us that we are not the center of the universe. Confidence reminds us that we are deeply loved by the One who is.

That is the tension Psalm 8 teaches us to live in every day.

We are wonderfully small. God is infinitely great.

And somehow, by His astonishing grace, the God who hung the stars with His fingers still knows your name, hears your prayers, counts the hairs on your head, and calls you His beloved child.

Perhaps that is why David could do nothing else but end where he began.

With worship.

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth.”

A Soul Song

There are moments in life when we need to be reminded that God is bigger than whatever stands in front of us.

Psalm 8 invites us to lift our eyes.

When we look only at ourselves, our problems often seem overwhelming. When we look only at the world around us, we can become discouraged by everything that is broken. But when we look to God, we begin to see everything else in its proper place.

Wonder has a way of restoring perspective.

David looked up at the heavens and was reminded of his own smallness. Yet instead of feeling insignificant, he discovered something even greater. The God who created the universe was mindful of him.

The same is true for you.

You are not an accident. You are not forgotten. You are not overlooked. You were created in the image of God, crowned with dignity, and deeply loved by your Creator.

Sin has distorted that image, but it has not erased it. Jesus came to restore what was broken.

Through His life, death, and resurrection, He makes it possible for us to become the people God created us to be. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, He continues shaping us into His likeness every day.

So whenever life feels too heavy...Look up.

Whenever fear begins to grow...Look up.

Whenever success tempts you to believe everything depends on you...Look up.

Whenever shame whispers that you are not enough...Look up.

The God who placed every star in the heavens is still mindful of fragile people like us.

And that truth is enough to make the soul sing.

A Prayer to Sing

Majestic God,

When I look at the beauty of Your creation, I am reminded that You are greater than I can imagine. The stars, the oceans, the mountains, and every living thing proclaim Your glory. Yet what amazes me even more is that You know me.

Thank You for seeing me when I feel invisible. Thank You for loving me when I struggle to love myself. Thank You for creating me in Your image and calling my life good.

Forgive me for the times I have tried to build my own kingdom instead of seeking Yours. Forgive me for the moments when I have forgotten that everything I have is a gift from Your hand.

Restore in me a sense of holy wonder.

Help me to slow down long enough to notice Your presence in the ordinary moments of life.

Teach me to see other people as You see them. May I recognize Your image in every person I meet. Give me compassion for those who are hurting, courage to serve those who are overlooked, and humility to remember that I, too, depend completely upon Your grace.

Lord Jesus, thank You for becoming the perfect image of humanity. Thank You for entering our brokenness so that we might share in Your life. Continue Your work within me through the power of the Holy Spirit. Shape my thoughts,

my words, and my actions until they reflect Your love more clearly.

Today I surrender my plans, my fears, my successes, and my failures to You. May my life point others toward Your majesty. And whenever I forget who I am, remind me whose I am.

In the name of Jesus Christ, my Creator, Redeemer, and King.

Amen.

Practicing the Psalm This Week

One of the best ways to understand a Psalm is to live it.

This week, consider these simple practices.

Look Up

Spend at least ten minutes outside one evening. Leave your phone inside. Simply watch the sky. Thank God for something in His creation that fills you with wonder.

Slow Down

Before beginning your day, pray Psalm 8:1 aloud. “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth.”

Let those words shape your perspective before anything else competes for your attention.

See God’s Image

Intentionally notice someone you might otherwise overlook.

Learn their name. Listen to their story. Offer encouragement.

Remember that every person you encounter bears the image of God.

Steward Well

Ask yourself: “What has God entrusted to my care?”

Spend time praying about one practical way you can be a more faithful steward of your family, your work, your church, your finances, or God’s creation.

End with Wonder

Before going to bed each night this week, write down one moment when you noticed God’s greatness during the day.

Allow gratitude to become a daily habit.

Questions for Reflection

1. When was the last time you experienced genuine wonder? What awakened it?
2. Why do you think David began by looking at God before looking at himself?
3. In what ways have you been tempted to find your identity in accomplishments instead of in being created in God’s image?
4. What does it mean to you that Jesus became the perfect image bearer on our behalf?
5. Who in your daily life might need to be seen as an image bearer of God this week?
6. What area of your life is God inviting you to steward more faithfully?

7. After reading Psalm 8, what is one truth you want your soul to remember this week?

A Verse to Carry with You

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!” -Psalm 8:1

Try memorizing this verse this week. Repeat it while driving, walking, working, or praying. Let it become the song your soul returns to throughout the day.

The Song in One Sentence: *The God who created the universe with His fingers still holds your life in His hands.*

2

Standing on What Never Changes Psalm 33

Have you ever watched the sun come up?
Not because you had somewhere to be. Not
because you couldn't sleep. But because you
simply wanted to watch a new day begin.

There is something holy about sunrise. The world is quiet.
The air feels different. Birds begin their morning songs
before most of us have even opened our eyes. Light slowly
pushes back the darkness until another day quietly
announces itself.

I love moments like that.

Sometimes I'll stand outside with a cup of coffee I am
taking to my wife. Other days, if I'm being honest, it might

be a Dr Pepper. Those who know me understand that, in my opinion, it is one of God's finer gifts.

As I watch the sky slowly brighten, one thought returns again and again. God never stopped working. While I slept, the earth continued turning. The sun continued rising. The oceans continued moving. The wind never stopped blowing. The stars remained exactly where He placed them. Creation never wondered whether God would show up this morning. It simply responded to the One who has faithfully sustained it since the beginning.

Every sunrise quietly proclaims the same message. God has not abandoned His world. Neither has He abandoned you.

The older I get, the more I realize that life is often shaped by the lens through which we see it.

Two people can walk through the same circumstances and experience them completely differently. One sees only disappointment. The other notices grace. One sees only uncertainty. The other sees opportunity. One becomes consumed by fear. The other quietly rests in hope. The circumstances may be identical. The difference is the lens.

Most of us naturally interpret God's love through the circumstances of our lives.

When life is good, we assume God is good. When life becomes difficult, we quietly begin wondering where He

went. When prayers seem unanswered, we question His faithfulness. When suffering lingers, we question His love.

Psalms 33 gently turns that way of thinking upside down.

Instead of looking at God's love through the lens of our circumstances, it invites us to look at our circumstances through the lens of God's steadfast love.

One of the most beautiful words in the entire Old Testament appears several times in this psalm. It is the Hebrew word *hesed*. No single English word fully captures its meaning.

It is steadfast love. Faithful love. Covenant love. Unfailing love. Love that refuses to let go. Love that keeps showing up. Love that remains when everything else changes.

The psalmist makes an astonishing declaration. "The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord." Not part of the earth. Not occasionally. Not only on our good days. The earth is already full of God's steadfast love.

Pause and think about that.

Before you ever opened this book...God's steadfast love was already here. Before you prayed this morning...God's steadfast love was already here. Before you ever knew His name...His love was already moving toward you. Long before you looked for Him...He was looking for you. That is the story of grace. God always makes the first move.

That is why Psalm 33 begins where it does. “Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous.”

The first word is not “obey.” It is not “perform.” It is not “earn.” It is not even “believe.” It is “rejoice.”

Because praise is always a response. We do not sing in order to convince God to love us. We sing because we have discovered that He already does.

Worship is not our attempt to climb our way into God’s presence. Worship is our joyful response to the God who has already come near. Perhaps that is why the psalm follows immediately after Psalm 32.

Psalm 32 celebrates forgiveness. Psalm 33 celebrates the God who forgives.

One psalm ends by saying, “Be glad in the Lord and rejoice.” The next begins, “Rejoice in the Lord.”

It is almost as though the two psalms are holding hands. Forgiven people become praising people. People who have experienced grace cannot help but sing.

Not because life is perfect. But because God is faithful.

The invitation to rejoice is followed immediately by a reason. “For the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.”

Notice what the psalmist does not say. He does not say the earth is full of comfort. He does not say the earth is full of ease. He does not say the earth is full of success. He says the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.

That is an entirely different way of seeing the world.

Most mornings, we wake up and immediately begin measuring our lives by our circumstances. How do I feel today? What happened in the markets yesterday? What do the headlines say? Did the doctor's appointment go well? How are my children doing? Is my job secure?

None of those questions are wrong. They are part of living in a broken world. But if they become the lens through which we interpret everything else, fear eventually becomes our companion.

The psalmist offers another way.

Begin with the steadfast love of God. Then interpret everything else from there. That does not deny pain. It does not pretend suffering isn't real. It simply refuses to give suffering the final word.

I have met people whose circumstances would make most of us question everything.

People battling cancer with remarkable peace. Parents who have buried children and still speak of God's faithfulness. Men and women who have lost jobs, homes, or spouses, yet

somehow continue to trust. Their confidence is not found in what is happening around them. It is rooted in the character of the God who walks with them.

That is the difference Psalm 33 invites us to discover.

Our circumstances change. God does not. The psalmist then lifts our eyes once again toward creation. “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.”

The Bible begins with those familiar words: “In the beginning...” Nothing existed except God. No mountains. No oceans. No stars. No galaxies. No people.

Then God spoke. Light. Sky. Land. Seas. Trees. Birds. Fish. Animals. Humanity. Everything we know exists because God spoke it into being.

The psalm reminds us that creation did not emerge from chaos accidentally arranging itself into beauty.

Creation came into existence because the Creator desired it. His Word is not merely informative. It is creative. His Word accomplishes what He intends. When God speaks, things happen. He spoke, and galaxies appeared. He commanded, and creation obeyed. He breathed, and the heavens stretched across the universe.

Sometimes I think we read those verses so often that we forget how astonishing they really are.

The God who spoke the universe into existence is still speaking. Not creating new galaxies. But speaking hope into weary hearts. Speaking forgiveness over repentant sinners. Speaking peace into anxious minds. Speaking life where death once ruled.

His Word has never lost its power. Every sunrise reminds us of that. Every changing season. Every breath we take. Every flower that blooms. Every wave that reaches the shore.

Creation continues responding to the voice of its Creator. God has not forgotten His world. He is still sustaining it. He is still holding it together. He is still at work, even when we cannot immediately see what He is doing.

That truth has become deeply personal for me. There have been seasons when I prayed for answers that seemed slow in coming. Moments when I wished God would explain what He was doing. Times when the future felt uncertain.

Perhaps you have experienced those seasons too.

When I look back, I realize something. Even when I could not see God's hand, I could always see His faithfulness. The sun still came up. Grace still met me each morning. His presence never left. His promises never changed. His love remained constant.

Sometimes the greatest evidence of God's faithfulness is not found in dramatic miracles. It is found in ordinary

mornings. The quiet gift of another sunrise. The laughter of a child. The embrace of a friend. The meal placed on our table. The strength to face another day.

These ordinary moments become extraordinary when we recognize them for what they are. They are reminders that God is still sustaining His creation. Every sunrise is a sermon. Every breath is a gift. Every ordinary day whispers that God's steadfast love has not run out.

The psalmist then shifts from creation to history.

“The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.”

I don't know about you, but it doesn't take long for the news to steal my attention. One headline announces another conflict. Another predicts economic uncertainty. Another tells us why we should be worried about tomorrow. If we're not careful, anxiety begins shaping our imagination more than Scripture does.

Psalms 33 reminds us that while the nations may be anxious, God is not.

Kings rise. Kings fall. Governments change. Economies expand and contract. Political movements gain momentum and then disappear into history.

Yet through every generation, one thing has remained unchanged.

God has never surrendered His throne. History has never slipped through His fingers. That does not mean everything that happens is God's desire.

Scripture is clear that human beings make real choices, and those choices often bring heartbreaking consequences. Wars are real. Injustice is real. Violence is real. Sin is tragically real.

But none of those things have the final word.

The purposes of God run deeper than the chaos of any particular moment. That truth has sustained God's people for thousands of years. It sustained Israel through exile. It sustained the early church through persecution. It has sustained believers through wars, plagues, economic collapse, and every kind of uncertainty imaginable.

The same God who ruled then still rules now. The future does not belong to fear. The future belongs to God. There is tremendous peace in remembering that. Not because we suddenly know what tomorrow will bring. But because we know the One who is already there.

Then the psalm takes an unexpected turn.

After speaking about creation and the rise and fall of nations, it becomes intensely personal. "A king is not saved

by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save.”

At first glance, those words may seem distant from our lives.

Most of us have never ridden a war horse into battle. We have never stood on an ancient battlefield counting soldiers or measuring military strength. Yet the people who first sang this psalm immediately understood the image. In the ancient world, war horses represented security. Power. Technology.

If your nation possessed horses, chariots, and a large army, you felt safe. You believed you could protect yourself from whatever threatened you.

The Israelites were different.

In fact, God repeatedly warned His people not to place their confidence in horses and chariots. They were never to believe that military strength would be their salvation.

Why?

Because God wanted His people to trust Him more than they trusted their resources. That warning has never gone out of date. We may not have war horses in our garages, but we all have them somewhere in our lives. Our war horses simply wear different saddles. For some, it is financial

security. “If I can just save enough, then I’ll finally feel safe.”

For others, it is success. “If I can climb one more rung on the ladder, then my life will matter.”

Sometimes it is our reputation. We spend enormous amounts of energy trying to control what other people think of us.

Sometimes it is politics. We quietly begin believing that if the right person is elected or the right policy is passed, then everything will finally be okay.

Sometimes it is our health. Or our intelligence. Or our relationships. Or our carefully planned future. None of those things are bad.

In fact, many of them are wonderful gifts from God. The problem begins when a gift quietly becomes a savior.

That is what idols always do. They promise more than they can deliver. They whisper, “If you have me, you’ll finally be secure.” “If you have enough of me, you’ll never have to worry again.” But they never keep their promises.

Money cannot guarantee peace. Success cannot satisfy the soul. Health cannot stop time. Power cannot conquer death. Every war horse eventually grows tired. Every false savior eventually disappoints.

One of the great tragedies of the human heart is that we often ask good things to do what only God can do.

We ask careers to give us purpose. We ask relationships to complete us. We ask achievements to tell us we matter. We ask possessions to make us feel secure.

The weight is simply too much for them to carry. They were never designed to be our salvation. Perhaps that is why Jesus spoke so often about treasure.

He knew that wherever our treasure settles, our trust soon follows.

So let me ask you the same question the psalm quietly asks me.

What is your war horse? When fear enters your life, where does your mind immediately run? When uncertainty appears, what do you cling to first? What do you secretly believe you cannot live without? The answer to those questions often reveals where our deepest trust has settled.

The psalm does not leave us there.

It immediately turns our attention away from human strength and toward God's watchful care. "Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love."

I have always loved that image.

When I was raising young children, there were moments when a trip to the grocery store felt like an adventure. Children have an amazing ability to wander toward exactly what they should not touch.

If you have ever pushed a shopping cart through a crowded store with little ones nearby, you understand.

You keep looking. You keep watching. Not because you are trying to control every movement. Because you love them. You are watching over them. You want them to explore. You want them to learn. You want them to enjoy the world around them.

But your eyes never leave them for very long. Love keeps watch.

That is the picture the psalm gives us.

God is not simply watching us. He is watching over us.

There is a world of difference between those two ideas.

Sometimes people imagine God as a distant observer, arms folded, waiting for us to fail.

Psalm 33 paints an entirely different picture. The eye of the Lord is not the eye of suspicion. It is the eye of a loving Father. He sees your burdens. He sees your grief. He sees the prayer you have almost stopped praying. He sees the diagnosis no one else understands. He sees the marriage

that feels fragile. He sees the financial pressure that keeps you awake at night. He sees the loneliness that hides behind a smile.

Nothing escapes His attention.

In Scripture, whenever God sees, He also moves. He saw Hagar in the wilderness. He saw Israel suffering in Egypt. He saw blind Bartimaeus beside the road. He saw Zacchaeus hiding in a tree. He saw Peter after his denial.

Again and again, God's seeing became the beginning of His saving work. That is still true today. The God who sees you is also the God who stays with you. He has never looked away.

Perhaps you need to hear that today. You have not been forgotten. You have not slipped through the cracks. You have not wandered beyond His care.

His eye is upon you.

Not because you have earned His attention. But because His steadfast love never stops pursuing His people. That realization changes the way we face tomorrow.

We no longer have to carry the impossible burden of protecting ourselves from every uncertainty. We still work hard. We still save wisely. We still plan responsibly. But our confidence no longer rests in our plans. Our confidence rests in the God who lovingly watches over His children.

That is a far more secure place to stand than any war horse this world can offer.

Everything the psalmist knew about God's steadfast love came through creation, covenant, and God's faithfulness to Israel. We have the privilege of seeing even more. We have seen God's steadfast love in the face of Jesus Christ.

When the Apostle John began his Gospel, he intentionally echoed the opening words of Genesis. "In the beginning was the Word..." Those words would have immediately reminded his readers of creation.

The Word spoke. The heavens were made. Life began. Light shattered the darkness. Then John says something almost unbelievable. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us."

The One who spoke creation into existence stepped into the world He had made. The Creator became part of His creation. The Author entered His own story.

When we wonder what God's steadfast love looks like, we do not have to guess. We look at Jesus.

Look at the way He welcomed children when everyone else tried to push them away. Look at the way He touched people no one else would touch. Look at the way He ate with sinners while religious leaders stood at a distance.

Look at the way He forgave those who nailed Him to a cross.

Every page of the Gospels tells the same story.

This is what God's steadfast love looks like.

It moves toward people. It heals. It restores. It forgives. It refuses to give up.

The Hebrew word *hesed* is difficult to translate because no single English word can capture all of its beauty.

Steadfast love. Faithful love. Mercy. Loving kindness. Covenant love. All of those are true. Jesus embodies every one of them. He is God's steadfast love with skin on.

In the last chapter we stood beneath the stars with David.

We marveled that the heavens were the work of God's fingers. Now we stand at another hill. Not beneath stars. But beneath a cross.

Those same hands that flung galaxies into space...stretched out upon rough wood. Those same hands that fashioned Adam from the dust...accepted nails for the sake of Adam's children. Those same hands that blessed little children...were pierced so that we might become children of God. Love has never been more clearly revealed than at Calvary.

The cross forever settles the question of whether God loves us. Whenever life becomes confusing...look at the cross.

Whenever suffering tempts you to wonder whether God has abandoned you...look at the cross.

Whenever shame whispers that you are beyond forgiveness...look at the cross. The cross does not answer every question.

But it answers the biggest one. God loves you. Not with fragile love. Not with temporary love. Not with love that depends on your performance. With steadfast love.

The resurrection then tells us something equally wonderful. God's steadfast love cannot be defeated.

Sin could not stop it. Death could not bury it. Hell could not overcome it. On Easter morning, steadfast love walked out of the tomb.

That changes how we live. It means failure is never final. It means death is never the end. It means hope is never wishful thinking.

Because Jesus lives, steadfast love still has the final word.

The psalm closes with one of the most beautiful pictures of faith in all of Scripture. "Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and our shield."

Waiting is one of the hardest parts of following Christ. We live in a culture that expects immediate answers. Immediate downloads. Immediate deliveries. Immediate solutions.

Yet much of the Christian life is lived in the space between God's promises and their fulfillment. That waiting can feel uncomfortable.

Sometimes it feels lonely. Sometimes it feels confusing. But biblical waiting is not passive. It is one of the deepest expressions of trust.

The Hebrew word describes hopeful expectation.

It is the posture of someone who knows God's character so well that they can wait without despair.

Think about a child standing at the window waiting for a parent to come home. The child does not know exactly when the car will pull into the driveway. But they know who is coming.

That knowledge changes the waiting. The certainty is not in the timing. The certainty is in the relationship.

That is the kind of waiting Psalm 33 invites us into.

We wait because we know who God is. We wait because we have seen His faithfulness before. We wait because His

steadfast love has never failed us. We wait because Jesus Christ has already conquered sin and death.

Waiting is not doing nothing. Waiting is choosing trust while God continues His work.

Perhaps you are waiting today.

Waiting for healing. Waiting for reconciliation. Waiting for direction. Waiting for an answer that seems slow in coming. You are not waiting alone.

The God whose eye is upon you is also walking beside you. The God who watches over you is already at work in ways you cannot yet see.

His steadfast love has not stopped. It has not weakened. It has not forgotten your name.

As I reflect on Psalm 33, I find myself returning to one simple truth.

Life is not determined by what I can see today. Life is determined by the God who has been faithful yesterday, who is faithful today, and who will remain faithful tomorrow.

The headlines will change. The markets will change. Governments will change. My circumstances will change. Even I will change. But the steadfast love of the Lord never changes.

That is where my hope rests. That is where my peace is found. That is where my soul learns to sing.

“Our soul waits for the Lord. He is our help and our shield. Our heart is glad in Him, because we trust in His holy name. Let Your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in You.”

A Soul Song

There are seasons when the world feels unsteady.

Headlines change by the hour. The economy rises and falls. Relationships become strained. Health can change with a single phone call. Plans that seemed certain suddenly disappear.

If we build our lives on things that constantly change, we should not be surprised when we constantly feel anxious.

Psalms 33 invites us to stand somewhere else.

It reminds us that beneath everything that shifts is the unchanging character of God.

His Word still speaks. His creation still declares His glory. His purposes still stand. His eye is still watching over His people. His steadfast love still fills the earth. That does not mean life will always be easy.

It does mean that we never face life's uncertainties alone. God was loving you before you recognized His love. He was working before you noticed His hand. He was faithful before you learned to trust Him. His grace always arrives first.

That is why we worship.

We do not sing to earn His favor. We sing because His favor has already been poured out upon us through Jesus Christ.

When fear begins to grow louder than faith, return to this psalm.

Read it slowly.

Lift your eyes. Remember the sunrise. Remember the cross. Remember the empty tomb. Then remind your soul of what has always been true. The steadfast love of the Lord has never failed.

It never will.

A Prayer to Sing

Faithful Father,

Thank You for loving me long before I knew how to love You. Thank You for pursuing me when I was wandering, calling me when I was distant, and remaining faithful even when my faith felt weak.

So often I confess that I allow my circumstances to determine how I feel about You. When life is easy, I find it simple to trust. When life becomes difficult, I begin asking questions that You have already answered through Your Son.

Forgive me for measuring Your love by my circumstances instead of measuring my circumstances by Your love.

Teach me to see differently.

Open my eyes to the countless reminders of Your faithfulness that surround me each day. Help me notice the sunrise, the kindness of a friend, the laughter of a child, the quiet work of Your Spirit, and the ordinary gifts that whisper of Your grace.

Lord, reveal the war horses I have trusted more than You.

If I have placed my confidence in success, remind me that my identity is found in Christ. If I have trusted money, remind me that You are my provider. If I have trusted my own strength, remind me that Your power is made perfect in weakness. If fear has become my companion, replace it with holy confidence in Your steadfast love.

Thank You for Jesus, the visible expression of Your unfailing love. Thank You that He entered our broken world, bore our sin upon the cross, and walked out of the grave victorious.

Because He lives, I know that hope is never wasted.

As I wait for prayers to be answered and for Your kingdom to come in its fullness, keep my heart anchored in Your promises.

Teach me to wait with expectation rather than anxiety.
Help me trust You one day at a time.

May my life become a song of gratitude that points others toward Your goodness. And when I am tempted to forget, gently remind me that Your steadfast love has never left me.

In the name of Jesus Christ, my Help and my Shield.

Amen.

Practicing the Psalm This Week

The Psalms are meant to be lived, not simply admired.

This week, allow Psalm 33 to shape the way you see the world.

Begin with Gratitude

Before looking at your phone each morning, thank God for three evidences of His steadfast love.

They do not have to be extraordinary.

A sunrise. A meal. A conversation. A quiet moment.

Train your heart to notice grace.

Identify Your War Horse

Spend a few moments asking yourself an honest question.

“When I become afraid, what do I trust first?”

Write your answer down.

Then ask God to help you place that part of your life back into His hands.

Read the Headlines Through the Gospel

The next time you read the news, pause before moving on with your day.

Pray this simple prayer: “Lord, You are still on the throne. Help me trust You more than I trust what I have just read.”

Encourage Someone

God’s steadfast love often reaches people through ordinary acts of kindness.

Call someone who is lonely. Write a note of encouragement. Pray with a friend. Deliver a meal. Become an instrument of the same steadfast love you have received.

End Each Day with Psalm 33

Before going to sleep, slowly read the final three verses of the psalm.

“Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in Him, because we trust in His holy name. Let Your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in You.”

Allow those words to become the final conversation your heart has with God before you rest.

Questions for Reflection

1. When have you most clearly experienced God's steadfast love in your own life?
2. Why do you think praise is the first response of people who have experienced grace?
3. What "war horse" are you most tempted to trust instead of God?
4. How does remembering God's faithfulness in creation strengthen your trust during difficult seasons?
5. What difference does it make to know that God is not only watching you, but watching over you?
6. How does Jesus reveal the fullness of God's steadfast love?
7. What prayer, burden, or situation are you currently waiting on God to answer?
8. What would it look like for you to interpret your circumstances through the lens of God's steadfast love this week?

A Verse to Carry with You

"The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord." -Psalm 33:5

Memorize this verse and return to it throughout the week.

Whenever anxiety begins to grow, quietly repeat these words. “The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.”

Let that truth become the lens through which you see everything else.

The Song in One Sentence: The steadfast love of God is the one foundation that never shifts, no matter how uncertain life becomes.

3

Remembering Grace Psalm 116

Have you ever forgotten something that once seemed unforgettable?

Not your keys. Not your password. Something much deeper. Have you ever forgotten what God has done for you?

Life has a way of doing that.

The bills arrive. The calendar fills up. Another doctor's appointment. Another difficult conversation. Another unexpected expense. Another prayer that seems to linger without an answer. And before we know it, today's burdens become so loud that yesterday's miracles become strangely quiet.

I wonder if that is why God tells His people to remember so often throughout Scripture.

Remember the Exodus. Remember the covenant.
Remember the wilderness. Remember the manna.
Remember the promises. Remember.

Because forgetfulness is one of the greatest enemies of faith.

When we forget God's faithfulness yesterday, we begin doubting His presence today.

Psalm 116 is one person's refusal to forget.

It is not a sermon. It is not a theological essay. It is a testimony.

It sounds like someone sitting across the table saying, "Let me tell you what God has done for me." "I love the Lord because He has heard my voice and my supplications." Those words are beautiful.

But they become even more beautiful when we realize they were written by someone who has already been through the valley.

This is not the voice of someone who has never suffered. This is the voice of someone looking back.

Someone remembering. Someone saying, "There was a season when I wasn't sure I would survive."

“There was a time when death felt close.” “There was a moment when I wondered if morning would ever come again.” “But I cried out.....and God heard me.” That is where every Christian testimony begins.

Not with our strength. Not with our wisdom. Not with our faithfulness. But with God’s.

The psalmist does not say, “I love the Lord because I handled everything well.”

He does not say, “I love the Lord because I finally figured life out.”

He says, “I love the Lord because He heard me.”

What a beautiful foundation for faith. Not that we always pray perfectly. But that God always listens perfectly.

The psalmist continues, “The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish.”

Those are not small words. This is someone describing a season when life became too heavy to carry alone.

Perhaps you know what that feels like. Maybe not the threat of physical death. Although some who read these pages certainly will.

But perhaps the death of a dream. The death of a marriage. The death of certainty. The death of the future you imagined.

Sometimes life unravels slowly. Sometimes it happens with one phone call.

Either way, there comes a moment when all of us discover the question beneath every other question. Who hears me when I cry?

The psalmist answers the question with a cry. “Then I called on the name of the Lord: ‘O Lord, I pray, save my life!’”

That is not a polished prayer. It is not impressive. It is not carefully worded. It is desperate. “Lord, save me.”

Sometimes that is the most faithful prayer we can pray.

Not, “Lord, help me understand everything.” Not, “Lord, give me the full plan.” Not, “Lord, explain why this is happening.” Just, “Lord, save me.”

“Lord, help me.”

“Lord, I cannot do this alone.”

There is a kind of prayer that only comes when every illusion of control has been stripped away. It may not sound

eloquent, but it is honest. And honest prayer has always mattered more to God than polished religious language.

The Psalms teach us that faith does not require pretending.

Faith does not mean calling anguish “fine.” Faith does not mean smiling while your heart is breaking. Faith does not mean hiding your doubts because you are afraid God cannot handle them. Faith tells the truth in the presence of God.

That is one of the reasons I love the Psalms so much. They give us permission to pray what is actually in us.

There are times to praise. There are times to sing loudly. There are times when joy rises naturally and thanksgiving feels easy. But there are also times when the most faithful thing you can say is, “God, this hurts.” “God, I am tired.” “God, I am afraid.” “God, I do not know how to forgive this person. I need You to forgive them through me.”

That is not weak faith. That is honest faith.

I have met many people who quietly believe they are bad Christians because they have questions. They worry too much. They doubt too often. They wonder where God is in the middle of their pain. They assume mature believers never struggle like that.

But the Psalms tell a different story. The Psalms are filled with faithful people asking honest questions in the presence of God.

The psalmist does not pretend the cords of death are not tight. He does not minimize distress and anguish.

He simply brings all of it to the Lord.

And here is the good news. God hears him.

The psalmist says, “I love the Lord because He has heard my voice and my supplications, because He inclined His ear to me.”

That image is tender.

God inclines His ear. Like a parent bending low to hear a child. Like a friend leaning closer when your voice begins to break. Like someone who refuses to let your pain disappear into the noise.

God does not stand far away with folded arms, waiting for the psalmist to get stronger. God bends low. God listens. God draws near. God hears.

Imagine what would change if the church actually believed that. Imagine what would happen if believers everywhere lived with the deep assurance that God was listening.

Not occasionally. Not reluctantly. Not only when our prayers sound spiritual enough. But always.

How much anxiety might loosen its grip if we knew we could release what we are carrying back into the hands of God?

How much fear would begin to fade if we remembered that the Creator of the universe hears even the prayers we cannot say out loud?

How much loneliness would be healed if we truly believed we are never alone?

Loneliness is one of the great aches of our time. People can be surrounded by others and still feel unseen. They can sit in a crowded room and wonder if anyone really knows them. They can smile through worship, small group, family gatherings, and daily routines while carrying the quiet fear that no one really cares.

I have heard it in hospitals. I have heard it in nursing homes. I have heard it in conversations after worship. “Pastor, I just don’t feel like anyone cares.”

Deep down, I know that is usually not the whole truth. There are often people who do care. But pain has a way of making love hard to see. Grief can make us feel forgotten. Anxiety can convince us we are alone. Suffering can narrow our vision until all we can see is what hurts.

Psalm 116 speaks into that place.

You are not forgotten. You are not unseen. You are not unheard. The Lord has inclined His ear to you.

That means God hears the prayers you speak in church, and He hears the prayers you whisper into your pillow.

He hears the cries that come out clearly, and He hears the ones trapped inside your chest. He hears the words you are afraid to say. He hears the sorrow beneath the silence. He hears the grief you cannot explain. And because He hears, you can call on Him as long as you live.

That is what the psalmist says. “Because He inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call on Him as long as I live.”

One answered cry becomes a lifetime of prayer. One experience of mercy becomes a lifelong relationship.

The psalmist does not merely say, “God helped me once.”

He says, “Now I know where to turn forever.” That is how testimony works.

We look back so we can look forward. We remember what God has done so we can trust Him with what we do not yet understand. We recall yesterday’s mercy so we can face today’s trouble with hope. Grace teaches us how to remember.

And when we remember rightly, we begin to see our present differently.

Once the psalmist remembers that God heard his cry, he begins remembering something even deeper.

He remembers who God is.

“Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful.”

Notice the order.

The psalmist does not begin with theology. He begins with experience.

God heard him. God rescued him. God remained with him.

Then, looking back over everything that had happened, he says, “Now I understand something about God’s character.”

He is gracious. He is righteous. He is merciful.

Sometimes our greatest moments of spiritual growth happen that way. There are truths we know with our minds because someone taught them to us. Then there are truths we know with our hearts because we have lived them.

There is a difference between believing that God is merciful and discovering His mercy when you desperately need it. There is a difference between saying God is faithful and watching Him carry you through a season you never thought you could survive. There is a difference between

reading that God is near and experiencing His presence in a hospital room, beside a graveside, or during another sleepless night.

The crisis itself is not the gift. Pain is never something we should seek. God does not delight in our suffering. But time and again, God meets us in our suffering.

And when He does, we often come to know Him more deeply than we did before.

The psalmist continues, “The Lord protects the simple; when I was brought low, He saved me.”

I love that verse because it gives hope to ordinary people.

The word translated “simple” does not mean unintelligent or foolish. It describes someone who is vulnerable.

Someone who is exposed. Someone without enough strength to rescue themselves. In other words, someone like me. Someone like you.

Most of us spend a tremendous amount of energy trying not to appear vulnerable. We want people to think we have everything under control. We smile when we are hurting. We answer, “I’m fine,” when we are anything but fine. We convince ourselves that maturity means never needing help.

Yet throughout Scripture, God continually moves toward people who know they need Him. The poor in spirit. The

brokenhearted. The weary. The humble. The forgotten. The overlooked.

God has always had a special concern for people who know they cannot save themselves. That should not surprise us. After all, none of us can.

Grace has never been a reward for spiritual achievement. Grace has always been God's gift to people who need it. Long before we learned how to pray well...God was listening. Long before we understood theology...God was working. Long before we turned toward Him...He was already moving toward us.

That is the beautiful mystery of grace. God always makes the first move.

Perhaps that is why one of my favorite verses in the entire psalm comes next.

“Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.”

I find it fascinating that the psalmist begins talking to himself.

Have you ever noticed how much we all talk to ourselves? Some psychologists estimate that we have thousands of internal conversations every day. Most of us never stop thinking. The question is not whether we are talking to ourselves. The question is what we are saying.

Fear has a voice. Shame has a voice. Regret has a voice. Anxiety has a voice. Sometimes they all seem to speak at once.

“You are not enough.” “You are going to fail.” “No one understands.” “You will never get through this.”

Those voices can become so familiar that we begin believing they are telling us the truth.

The psalmist chooses another voice. He speaks truth to his own soul. “Return, O my soul, to your rest.” That is not denial.

His circumstances may not have changed completely. Life may still be uncertain. But his soul no longer has to wander. His soul has a home.

There is something deeply beautiful about that word, “return.” It reminds us that rest is not something we manufacture. It is something we come home to.

How many of us spend our lives looking for rest in places that can never provide it? We look for rest in vacations. In success. In retirement. In entertainment. In approval. In achievements. None of those things are wrong.

They simply cannot quiet the deepest restlessness of the human heart. Only God can do that.

Augustine famously wrote, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

The psalmist would have understood exactly what he meant.

Fear scatters us. Grief scatters us. Disappointment scatters us. Trauma scatters us. Sin scatters us. Grace gathers us back together.

“Return, O my soul, to your rest.”

That may be one of the most important things you need to hear today. Not because every problem has disappeared. Not because every prayer has already been answered. But because your soul was never designed to carry the weight of the world. Your soul was designed to rest in the God who carries the world.

Then the psalmist remembers even more. “For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.”

What a beautiful picture of salvation.

God saves the whole person. He delivers the soul. He wipes away tears. He steadies unsteady feet.

Notice how complete God’s care is. He does not simply forgive sins and leave us to figure everything else out. He

restores. He heals. He strengthens. He comforts. He walks beside us.

The longer I have followed Christ, the more convinced I have become that salvation is much bigger than I once imagined. It certainly includes forgiveness.

Praise God for that.

But it is also the restoration of our hearts. The healing of our relationships. The renewal of our minds. The transformation of our character. The steady work of the Holy Spirit making us more like Jesus. God is not simply preparing us for heaven someday. He is teaching us how to live as citizens of His kingdom today.

That is why the next verse matters so much.

“I walk before the Lord in the land of the living.”

Notice the movement. The psalmist does not say, “I was rescued, so I went back to life exactly as it was before.” Grace never leaves us where it found us. Deliverance becomes discipleship. Rescue becomes relationship. Gratitude becomes a new way of walking.

That is the invitation of Psalm 116. Not merely to survive. But to walk. Not merely to breathe. But to live.

Not merely to remember what God has done. But to allow His grace to shape every step we take from this day forward.

Just when we think the psalm has settled into quiet gratitude, the psalmist surprises us again.

“I kept my faith, even when I said, ‘I am greatly afflicted’; I said in my consternation, ‘Everyone is a liar.’”

That is an interesting confession. It almost feels out of place. Why would someone writing a song of thanksgiving suddenly say something like that?

Perhaps because gratitude does not erase memory. The psalmist has not forgotten what those difficult days felt like. He remembers the confusion. He remembers the fear. He remembers promises that could not hold the weight of his suffering.

The word translated “consternation” carries the idea of panic, alarm, or overwhelming distress. We might say today, “I was beside myself,” or “I was overwhelmed.”

The psalmist is looking back and saying, “When everything was falling apart, I reached the point where I realized that every human promise has limits.”

That is very different from becoming cynical.

He is not saying that every person is dishonest. He is saying that every human source of security eventually reaches its limit. Doctors can diagnose and treat. They cannot promise tomorrow. Friends can sit beside us in our grief. They cannot remove the pain. Parents can protect their children. They cannot protect them from everything. Money can provide options. It cannot purchase peace. Success can open doors. It cannot quiet an anxious heart.

Even our own strength has limits. There comes a moment when every one of us discovers that the things we have trusted simply cannot carry the full weight of our lives. That realization can feel frightening at first. But it can also become one of God's greatest gifts.

Because when lesser foundations begin to shake, we are invited to stand upon the One foundation that never moves.

That is exactly what the psalmist discovers.

Instead of placing his confidence in human promises, he begins asking a different question. "What shall I return to the Lord for all His bounty to me?" That may be one of the most important questions in the Christian life.

How do you respond to grace? What do you give to the God who has already given you everything?

Can you repay mercy? Can you earn forgiveness after you have received it? Can you somehow balance the scales of grace?

The answer, of course, is no.

Grace is never repaid. Grace is received.

We do not spend our lives trying to pay God back. We spend our lives learning to live in joyful response to what He has already done.

The psalmist understands this.

His first response is not to promise bigger sacrifices. It is not to make grand speeches. It is not to negotiate with God.

Instead he says, “I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.” That image would have immediately been familiar to God’s people.

Psalm 116 was sung during the Passover celebration.

Near the end of the meal came the fourth cup, often called the Cup of Salvation. As God’s people lifted that cup, they remembered how the Lord had delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt.

Generation after generation, they remembered the mighty acts of God. They remembered grace.

Now imagine another Passover meal. An upper room. A table. Twelve disciples. Jesus takes bread into His hands. He breaks it. “This is My body, which is given for you.” Then He lifts the cup. The very cup that reminded Israel of God’s saving work.

And He gives it new meaning.

“This cup is the new covenant in My blood, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Can you imagine what the disciples must have felt? For centuries they had lifted the cup remembering the Exodus. Now Jesus tells them that God’s greatest act of deliverance is about to unfold before their eyes.

The old story is not being discarded. It is being fulfilled. The cup of salvation is no longer pointing only backward. It is now pointing directly to Christ.

Everything Psalm 116 anticipated finds its deepest fulfillment in Jesus.

The psalmist cried, “O Lord, save my life.” Jesus gave His life.

The psalmist was delivered from death. Jesus entered death itself.

The psalmist said, “You have loosed my bonds.” Jesus willingly allowed Himself to be bound so that our chains could be broken.

The psalmist lifted the cup of salvation. Jesus drank the cup of suffering.

Think about the beauty of that exchange.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, “Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me.” It was the cup of judgment. The cup of suffering. The cup of sin. He drank it completely.

So that you and I might forever lift another cup.

The cup of salvation.

That is the Gospel.

Christ takes what belonged to us so that we might receive what belongs to Him. He bears our sin. We receive His righteousness. He enters our death. We receive His life. He carries our shame. We receive His joy. He drinks the cup of suffering. We lift the cup of salvation.

Every time we come to the Lord’s Table, we are doing far more than remembering an event. We are proclaiming a Person. We are announcing that the God who heard the cry of the psalmist has now answered the deepest cry of humanity through Jesus Christ.

The bread reminds us that God came near. The cup reminds us that grace cost more than we could ever imagine. Communion is not a reward for people who have everything together. It is a means of grace for people who know they need Jesus.

Every time I come to the Table, I am reminded that I cannot repay grace. All I can do is receive it again. That realization has changed the way I think about worship.

So often we arrive at church wondering what we have to give God. What songs will we sing? What offering will we bring? What promises will we make?

The Gospel gently turns that question around.

Before we bring anything to God, God has already given everything to us. Our worship begins, not with our generosity toward God, but with His generosity toward us. That is why gratitude is such a powerful force in the Christian life. Gratitude keeps bringing us back to grace.

It keeps reminding us that everything begins with God. Everything flows from His love. Everything rests upon His mercy. And when we remember that, worship no longer feels like an obligation.

It becomes a joyful response to the God who has dealt bountifully with us.

The psalmist's response to grace is beautifully simple. "I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people." "I will offer to You a thanksgiving sacrifice." "I will call on the name of the Lord."

Notice where all of this happens.

In the presence of God's people. The psalmist does not keep God's goodness to himself. He does not quietly move on with life as though nothing happened. He comes into worship. He stands among the congregation. He tells the story.

That has always been one of the great gifts of the church. The church is not simply a place where we learn about God. It is a place where we hear what God has been doing in one another's lives.

Every testimony strengthens someone else's faith. Every story of God's faithfulness becomes a reminder that He has not stopped working.

When one person says, "God carried me through cancer," someone sitting nearby quietly begins to believe that God may be able to carry them too.

When someone shares how God restored a broken marriage, another couple finds the courage to keep praying.

When someone says, “I did not think I was going to make it, but God never left me,” hope begins to grow in hearts that were close to giving up.

That is why testimony matters. Not because our stories are extraordinary. But because God is.

There is something deeply encouraging about hearing another believer say, “I cried out, and God heard me.”

It reminds us that we are not walking this journey alone.

One of the greatest lies we believe is that everyone else has their life together.

We look around on Sunday morning and see smiling faces. Families dressed nicely. People greeting one another. Children laughing. Conversations filling the hallways. It is easy to assume that everyone else is doing just fine.

But if we sat together long enough, the stories would begin to emerge. The husband quietly praying for his wife. The woman carrying grief that no one else can see. The young adult wondering what comes next. The parent exhausted from caring for a special needs child. The retiree learning how to live after losing a spouse. The teenager struggling to believe they matter. The businessman carrying more anxiety than anyone realizes.

Every pew contains stories. Every heart carries burdens. Every life is still being shaped by grace. The church has

never been a gathering of people who have escaped suffering. It has always been a gathering of people learning to trust Christ in the middle of it.

Some are still in the valley. Some have just climbed out.

Others have walked through enough valleys that they have learned how to guide people who are just beginning the journey.

That is why worship matters so much. Worship reminds us that our stories belong inside God's larger story. It reminds us that we are not isolated individuals trying to survive on our own. We are brothers and sisters learning together what it means to follow Jesus. Every hymn we sing. Every prayer we offer. Every Scripture we read. Every testimony we hear. Every celebration around the Lord's Table.

All of it forms us into the people God is calling us to become.

The psalmist continues, "O Lord, I am Your servant...You have loosed my bonds." Those two statements belong together.

Notice the order.

First: "You have loosed my bonds." Then: "I am Your servant."

The psalmist does not become free because he serves. He serves because he has been set free. Grace always comes first. Freedom always comes before faithful obedience. This is the rhythm of the Christian life.

God loves us. God rescues us. God forgives us. God restores us.

Then, out of grateful hearts, we joyfully offer our lives back to Him.

If we try to earn God's love through our obedience, we will eventually become exhausted. If we try to prove ourselves worthy of grace, we will always feel like failures.

But when we realize that Christ has already done everything necessary for our salvation, obedience becomes something entirely different.

It becomes love responding to Love. Not obligation. Not fear. Not guilt. Love. This is why gratitude is such a powerful force in spiritual formation.

People who are trying to earn God's approval rarely experience joy. They are always wondering if they have done enough.

People who know they have already been loved begin living differently. They forgive more freely. They become more generous. They worship more deeply. They serve more

joyfully. Not because they have to. Because they want to. Gratitude changes us.

As I think about Psalm 116, I cannot help but wonder what might happen if every one of us intentionally remembered God's faithfulness more often.

What if we spent as much time remembering answered prayers as we do worrying about unanswered ones?

What if we rehearsed God's faithfulness as often as we replay our fears? What if our first instinct in difficult seasons was to remember where God has already met us?

I suspect our hearts would become steadier. Our worship would become deeper. Our witness would become more compelling.

One of the reasons Israel celebrated Passover every year was because memory shapes identity. If they forgot God's deliverance from Egypt, they would eventually forget who they were.

The same is true for us.

If we forget the Cross...

If we forget the empty tomb...

If we forget the countless ways God has carried us...

We slowly begin living as though everything depends on us again. That is a heavy burden to carry.

Psalms 116 gently invites us to lay that burden down.

Remember.

Remember the prayers God has answered. Remember the nights He carried you. Remember the people He sent into your life at just the right time. Remember the doors He opened. Remember the strength He provided. Remember the forgiveness you received. Remember the grace that met you before you even knew you needed it. Then let those memories become songs of thanksgiving.

Not because life has always been easy. But because God has always been faithful.

Perhaps that is why the psalm begins the way it does.

“I love the Lord because He has heard my voice.”

What a beautiful way to summarize an entire life. Not, “I love the Lord because everything turned out exactly as I hoped.” Not, “I love the Lord because I always understood what He was doing.” Simply, “I love the Lord because He heard me.”

Maybe that is enough.

Enough to keep praying. Enough to keep trusting. Enough to keep walking. Enough to keep worshiping. Enough to keep telling others what God has done.

The older I become, the more convinced I am that one of the greatest gifts we can give another person is our testimony. Not a polished version that makes us look impressive. An honest one. One that says, “I doubted.” “I struggled.” “I cried.” “I wondered.” “But God never stopped listening.

God never stopped loving. God never stopped working. And looking back now, I can say with confidence:

I love the Lord...because He heard my cry.”

A Soul Song

There are moments in life that change us forever.

Some are filled with joy. The birth of a child. A wedding. The embrace of a friend after years apart.

Others are marked by tears. A difficult diagnosis. The loss of someone we love. A season when the future felt uncertain and our prayers seemed to be little more than whispered cries in the dark.

Those moments become part of our story.

Psalm 116 reminds us that God's grace becomes part of our story too.

The psalmist does not pretend life has always been easy.

He remembers the cords of death. He remembers the tears. He remembers stumbling. But he also remembers something greater.

He remembers the God who heard him.

That is what gratitude really is.

It is not pretending everything has gone according to plan. It is remembering that God has been faithful even when life has not.

Gratitude is the discipline of remembering grace.

It looks back so that faith can move forward. It tells the truth about the pain without forgetting the presence of God. It refuses to allow today's burdens to erase yesterday's faithfulness.

Perhaps that is why the psalmist speaks to his own soul.

He knows that memory requires intention.

Left to ourselves, we remember our failures more easily than God's mercy. We replay our fears more often than His faithfulness. We dwell on what went wrong instead of giving thanks for how far His grace has already brought us.

Psalm 116 gently calls us home.

Remember.

Remember the prayer God answered. Remember the strength He gave when yours ran out. Remember the friend He sent at just the right time. Remember the forgiveness you never deserved. Remember the cross. Remember the empty tomb. Remember that the God who heard your cry has never stopped listening.

The more we remember grace, the more naturally gratitude begins to fill our lives.

And grateful people become hopeful people.

Not because life is suddenly easy. But because they know the One who has carried them before will carry them again.

A Prayer to Sing

Gracious Father,

Thank You for hearing me.

Long before I knew the right words to pray, You were already listening. Long before I understood Your grace, You were already pursuing me.

Thank You for every moment You carried me when I was too weak to stand. Thank You for every prayer You

answered in ways I recognized, and for the countless ways
You were working even when I could not see Your hand.

Forgive me for the times I have forgotten Your faithfulness.
Forgive me for allowing today's worries to become louder
than yesterday's miracles.

Teach me to remember.

When fear begins to speak, remind me of Your promises.
When grief feels overwhelming, remind me of Your
presence. When I begin believing I must carry everything
alone, remind me that You have always been my help and
my shield.

Thank You for Jesus Christ.

Thank You that He entered our suffering, carried our sin,
drank the cup of suffering, and now offers us the cup of
salvation.

Because of Him, I know that death does not have the final
word. Because of Him, I know that grace is stronger than
my failures. Because of Him, I know that I never pray alone.

Holy Spirit, continue Your work within me. Gather together
the scattered places of my heart. Teach my soul to return to
its rest. Shape me into a person whose life tells the story of
Your goodness.

May my gratitude become worship. May my worship become obedience. May my obedience become a witness that points others toward Jesus. And whenever I am tempted to forget, gently whisper again to my heart that You have always heard my cry.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen.

Practicing the Psalm This Week

Psalm 116 is not simply read. It is remembered. Allow these practices to help this psalm become part of your own story.

Tell Your Story

Take fifteen minutes this week to write down one specific time when God carried you through a difficult season.

What happened? How did you pray? How did God meet you? Share that story with someone you trust. Your testimony may become someone else's hope.

Begin a “Book of Remembrance”

Find a notebook and write the date at the top of the first page. Each day this week, write down one evidence of God's faithfulness.

Do not overthink it.

A conversation. A sunrise. An answered prayer. A meal. A moment of peace.

Over time, this will become your own collection of testimonies.

Speak to Your Soul

Several times this week, slowly pray these words aloud:

“Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.”

Notice how your heart responds when you intentionally preach grace to yourself.

Receive the Cup

If your church celebrates Holy Communion this week, come to the Table slowly.

Remember that Jesus drank the cup of suffering so you could receive the cup of salvation.

If your church is not celebrating Communion, spend a few moments reading the account of the Last Supper in one of the Gospels.

Thank Christ for the gift of His life.

Encourage Someone

Think of someone who is walking through a difficult season.

Call them. Visit them. Write them a note.

Tell them one way you have seen God’s faithfulness in your own life.

Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer another person is the reminder that God still hears our cries.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is one prayer that God has answered in your life that you never want to forget?
2. Why do you think remembering is so important to the life of faith?
3. What does it mean to you that God “inclines His ear” toward His people?
4. Which phrase from Psalm 116 speaks most deeply to your current season of life?
5. What “cords of death” or “places of anguish” has God already carried you through?
6. How has God’s grace changed the way you see yourself?
7. Who needs to hear your testimony this week?
8. What would it look like for gratitude to become a daily habit instead of an occasional emotion?

A Verse to Carry with You

“Return, O my soul, to your rest for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.” ~Psalm 116:7

Write this verse somewhere you will see it often this week.

When anxiety begins to rise, let these words call your heart back to the God who has always been faithful.

Remember...

You will forget many things as the years pass. You will forget names. You will forget dates. You will forget where you left your keys. But do not forget the God who heard your cry.

Remember the nights He carried you. Remember the prayers He answered. Remember the grace that found you before you ever thought to look for Him.

Tell the stories. Lift the cup. Keep walking before the Lord in the land of the living. The soul that remembers grace is a soul that learns to sing.

The Song in One Sentence: Gratitude begins when we remember that the God who heard our cry has never stopped listening.

4

Thirsting for God Psalm 42

There are few experiences more powerful than real thirst.

Not the kind of thirst that makes you think a glass of water would be nice. The kind that overtakes your entire body. Your mouth grows dry. Your energy begins to fade. Your attention narrows until one desire rises above every other. Water becomes the only thing that matters.

That is how Psalm 42 begins.

“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for You, O God.”

For years I pictured that verse as a peaceful scene. I imagined a deer standing quietly beside a gentle stream, drinking in the cool shade of the trees. It is a beautiful image, but it is not the picture the psalmist is painting.

The deer is not standing beside the water. The deer is looking for it. It has been running. Its body is exhausted. Its mouth is dry. Its life depends upon finding a stream before its strength gives out.

This is not a song about quiet contentment. It is a song about desperate longing.

The psalmist is not writing from a place of comfort. He is writing from a place of absence. “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

Notice what he longs for.

He does not say he longs for relief. He does not first long for his circumstances to change. He does not ask for better days or easier answers. He longs for God. The living God.

That longing is important because it reminds us that Christianity has never been primarily about ideas or rituals. At its heart, our faith is about relationship. We were created to know God, to walk with Him, to delight in His presence, and to be transformed by His love.

Everything else flows from that relationship.

Psalm 42 opens the second book of the Psalms, and that placement matters. Up to this point, the Psalter has taught us about trust, worship, repentance, and praise. Now it introduces another reality that every believer eventually experiences.

There are seasons when God feels far away. There are seasons when worship that once came easily suddenly feels difficult. There are seasons when prayer becomes quieter. There are seasons when our hearts ache for God in ways we cannot explain.

The psalmist knows exactly what that feels like. He remembers worship. He remembers walking with God's people. He remembers songs of celebration echoing through the courts of the Temple. He remembers the joy of gathering together with others to praise the Lord.

But now those memories only deepen the ache. He is far from Jerusalem. Far from the Temple. Far from the place where he had most clearly experienced God's presence. "My tears have been my food day and night."

What an honest sentence.

Most of us have had days when we forgot to eat because life became overwhelming.

The psalmist speaks as though sorrow itself has become his daily bread.

His tears accompany him morning and night.

And while he is grieving, another voice begins asking a painful question. "Where is your God?"

Sometimes those words come from people around us. They may never say them aloud, but we hear the question underneath their words. “If God is so good, why is this happening?” “If God loves you, why hasn’t He answered your prayer?” “If God is with you, why do you still hurt?”

Sometimes the question comes from within. Late at night. During another doctor’s appointment. After another disappointment.

In the silence that follows another unanswered prayer. Where is God?

If you have ever asked that question, you are not alone. In fact, you are in very good company.

The Bible is full of faithful people who wrestled with that same question. Job asked it. David asked it. Jeremiah asked it. Even Jesus cried from the cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Questions do not disqualify faith. Sometimes they reveal how deeply we desire God. That is one of the great gifts of Psalm 42.

The psalm does not shame our longing. It gives it language. It reminds us that mature faith is not pretending we never struggle. Mature faith is bringing our struggle honestly before the Lord.

The psalmist does not hide behind religious language. He does not pretend everything is fine.

He tells the truth. “My soul is cast down.” “My tears have been my food.” “Deep calls to deep.”

“All Your waves and breakers have gone over me.”

That is not weak faith.

It is courageous faith.

Only someone who truly trusts God can speak to Him with that kind of honesty.

Biblical lament is never the opposite of faith. It is faith refusing to settle for superficial answers. It is faith that loves God enough to bring Him the whole truth.

That is why Psalm 42 has become such a gift to believers through the centuries. It reminds us that there are seasons when faith sings loudly.

There are also seasons when faith simply thirsts. Both belong to the life of following God.

There is another detail about Psalm 42 that is easy to overlook but worth remembering.

This psalm begins the second book of the Psalms. The Psalter is divided into five books, and many scholars have noted that those five books intentionally mirror the five

books of Moses. Just as the first book of the Psalms echoes Genesis by introducing creation, covenant, and humanity's relationship with God, the second book begins to echo the story of Exodus.

It is fitting, then, that Psalm 42 is filled with the language of exile and longing.

This is the prayer of someone who wants to come home.

The superscription tells us this is “a Maskil of the Korahites.” That little phrase may seem unimportant, but it carries a remarkable story.

The descendants of Korah served as worship leaders in Israel. Yet their family history was marked by tragedy. Korah himself had led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, believing he deserved a place God had not given him. The rebellion ended in judgment, and Korah's name became associated with pride and brokenness.

Yet God was not finished with that family.

Generations later, the descendants of Korah were no longer remembered primarily for rebellion. They became worship leaders.

What an incredible picture of redemption.

The family once known for its failure became known for leading God's people into His presence. Grace has a way of rewriting stories. Perhaps that gives hope to someone reading these pages.

Your family's past does not have to determine your future. Your failures do not have to become your identity. God delights in redeeming what once seemed beyond repair.

Now imagine these worship leaders writing from exile.

Imagine men whose lives had been devoted to leading worship suddenly separated from the Temple.

Separated from the songs they loved. Separated from the people they served. Separated from the place where they had most clearly encountered the presence of God.

No wonder they cried, "When shall I come and behold the face of God?"

This is not merely homesickness. It is soul sickness.

The psalmist remembers walking with the multitude toward the house of the Lord.

He remembers the festivals. The music. The laughter. The prayers. The joy of standing shoulder to shoulder with God's people in worship. Those memories are beautiful.

But they also make the present ache even more deeply.

Have you ever experienced something like that? Perhaps there was a season when prayer came easily. Scripture seemed alive. Worship filled your heart with joy. God's presence felt unmistakably close.

Then life changed. Loss came. Disappointment arrived. The songs became harder to sing. Prayer became quieter.

The same Bible sat open before you, but the words no longer seemed to leap from the page.

You still believed. You simply felt thirsty.

I have discovered that many faithful Christians quietly carry shame during seasons like that. They assume everyone else feels close to God all the time. They wonder what is wrong with them. They begin trying harder. Reading more. Praying longer. Serving more faithfully.

Not because those things are wrong, but because they hope one more spiritual effort will make God feel close again.

Psalm 42 gently removes that shame.

The psalmist is not condemned for longing.

He is not rebuked for thirsting. He is not criticized for asking difficult questions.

Instead, Scripture preserves his prayer so generations of believers will know they are not alone. Longing belongs to the life of faith.

In fact, longing may be one of the clearest signs that faith is still alive.

Think about that for a moment.

A spiritually dead heart does not thirst for God. A heart that has completely abandoned Him does not cry, “When shall I come before God?”

Only someone who has tasted His goodness longs to taste it again. Only someone who has known His presence mourns when it feels distant. That longing is not evidence that God has abandoned you.

It may actually be evidence that God is awakening something deeper within you.

The psalmist’s thirst is not proof of God’s absence.

It is evidence that God is still drawing him.

That is grace.

Long before we know how to seek God, He has already begun seeking us. Long before we can describe our spiritual hunger, the Holy Spirit has already begun awakening it.

The desire itself is a gift. Perhaps you have felt that longing before. You cannot quite explain it. Life is going well enough. Your family is doing okay. Your work is steady. Nothing dramatic has happened.

Yet somewhere deep inside, there is an ache.

A quiet awareness that there must be more. More than success. More than comfort. More than another vacation. More than another accomplishment. More than another distraction. That longing is not your enemy. It may be one of God's greatest gifts.

The world constantly tells us to satisfy our thirst as quickly as possible. Buy something. Accomplish something. Escape into entertainment. Stay busy enough that you never have to think about what your soul actually needs.

Yet none of those things can satisfy the deepest thirst of the human heart. They may distract us for a little while. But eventually the thirst returns.

Because we were never created merely for pleasure. Or success. Or security.

We were created for communion with the living God. Every lesser thirst is ultimately pointing toward our deepest one. That is why Jesus' words become so beautiful. "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." Jesus does not condemn thirsty people.

He invites them. He does not wait until they have figured everything out. He simply says, “Come.” Bring your questions. Bring your doubts. Bring your weariness. Bring your disappointments. Bring your whole self.

The invitation has never been to pretend you are satisfied. The invitation has always been to come thirsty.

The psalmist never fully resolves the tension.

That is one of the reasons I love this psalm.

Most of us prefer stories that wrap everything up neatly. We want the problem solved by the last page. We want the tears to stop. We want every question answered.

Psalm 42 does not give us that.

The enemies are still asking, “Where is your God?” The tears have not completely dried. The exile has not yet ended. The thirst remains. Yet something begins to change.

Not the circumstances. The perspective.

Twice the psalmist asks himself the same question. “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?”

I find it fascinating that he begins talking to himself. We all do.

From the moment we wake up until we fall asleep, there is an ongoing conversation taking place inside our minds. Some of those conversations are helpful. Others slowly pull us deeper into fear.

Our inner voice often becomes our loudest voice. “I’ll never get through this.” “I’m all alone.” “Nothing is ever going to change.” “God must have forgotten me.” “I’m not enough.”

The psalmist understands that if he only listens to those voices, despair will eventually become his master.

So he does something courageous. He begins preaching to his own soul. “Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my help and my God.”

Notice what he does not say.

He does not tell himself to ignore his feelings. He does not pretend the pain isn’t real. He does not shame himself for struggling. He acknowledges every bit of it. “My soul is cast down.”

That is honest.

But then he refuses to let his emotions become the final authority. He reminds himself of something even more true. God is still God.

Hope is not wishful thinking. Hope is confidence rooted in God’s character rather than our circumstances.

That is one of the most important spiritual disciplines we can learn. There are days when no one else is around to encourage us.

No one is there to remind us of God's promises. No one is there to speak hope into our discouragement.

On those days, we must learn to open God's Word and preach it to ourselves.

Perhaps that feels strange.

We often think of preaching as something that happens on Sunday morning.

But some of the most important sermons you will ever hear are the ones you quietly preach to your own heart.

I have had to do that more times than I can count. There have been seasons when discouragement seemed louder than hope. Moments when ministry felt heavy. Times when prayers appeared unanswered. In those moments, I have had to stop and remind myself, "Ryan, remember who God is." "Remember what He has already done." "Remember how many times He has carried you before." "Remember that His character has not changed."

Sometimes our souls need to hear the Gospel from our own lips.

The psalmist teaches us that. He teaches us to speak truth gently but firmly into the places where fear wants to settle.

Then the psalm reaches one of its most beautiful images. “Deep calls to deep at the thunder of Your waterfalls; all Your waves and Your breakers have gone over me.”

For years those words confused me. Were the deep waters comforting? Or were they overwhelming?

I have come to believe the answer is both.

The psalmist feels as though wave after wave is crashing over him.

One hardship follows another. One disappointment gives way to the next. Grief rarely arrives alone. Neither does anxiety.

Sometimes life feels like standing in the ocean while one wave knocks you down before you have even regained your footing from the last.

Perhaps you have lived through seasons like that. One diagnosis. Then another. One loss. Then another. One unexpected phone call. Then another.

You finally catch your breath only to discover another wave already approaching.

The psalmist does not minimize that experience. He names it.

Yet even here, something remarkable happens. The waves belong to God. “Your waves.” “Your breakers.” The circumstances may feel overwhelming, but they are not outside God’s knowledge. They are not beyond His reach. The waves may be stronger than the psalmist. They are not stronger than the One who made the sea.

Then, almost unexpectedly, another note enters the song. “By day the Lord commands His steadfast love, and at night His song is with me.” What a remarkable sentence.

During the day, God’s steadfast love. During the night, God’s song.

Notice that the night has not disappeared. Darkness is still present.

Yet so is God.

The Hebrew word we encountered in the previous chapter appears again. *Hesed*. Steadfast love. Covenant love. Faithful love. Love that refuses to let go. The psalmist cannot always feel God’s presence. But God’s steadfast love remains present anyway. That is an important distinction.

Our feelings are real. They simply are not always reliable indicators of God’s nearness. There are days when God feels incredibly close. There are other days when heaven

seems silent. Neither feeling changes the reality of His love. The sun has not disappeared simply because clouds have hidden it from view.

In the same way, God's faithfulness has not disappeared simply because our emotions cannot always perceive it. That truth finds its fullest expression in Jesus Christ.

The psalmist thirsted for the living God.

Centuries later, Jesus stood in the Temple and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." What an astonishing invitation. Jesus does not merely promise water. He offers Himself.

The One for whom the psalmist longed now stands before humanity saying, "I am here."

Yet the story becomes even more beautiful at the cross.

As Jesus hung upon the cross, He spoke two words that forever connect Him to Psalm 42. "I thirst." The Creator of every river...thirsted.

The One who called water from the rock in the wilderness...thirsted.

The One who turned water into wine...thirsted.

The One who offered living water to the woman at the well...thirsted.

Why?

Because He entered our drought. Completely. He stepped into our loneliness. Our grief. Our abandonment. Our silence. Our questions. Our death.

The psalmist wondered where God was.

At Calvary, God answered that question forever. He was hanging on a cross. Not distant. Not indifferent. Not absent. Present. Suffering. Loving. Redeeming.

The cross does not explain every dry season. It does something even better. It assures us that we will never experience one alone.

The resurrection then declares that no drought has the final word. No desert lasts forever. No darkness can overcome the light of Christ. The risen Jesus is living proof that hope is never misplaced.

When the psalmist cried, “My soul thirsts for God,” he could only imagine the day when God Himself would come searching for thirsty people.

We know that day has come. Jesus Christ is the living water our souls have always been seeking. He is not simply the answer to our questions. He is the satisfaction of our deepest thirst.

There is one final lesson Psalm 42 teaches us.

Hope is not something we discover once and never need again. Hope is something we choose, again and again, as we walk with God.

That is why the refrain appears twice.

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my help and my God.”

The psalmist is not speaking to the crowds. He is speaking to himself.

That may be one of the most overlooked disciplines of the Christian life.

There are days when we must remind our own hearts of what we already know to be true.

We remember God’s faithfulness. We remember His promises. We remember His character. We remember that Jesus Christ is risen. We remember that the Holy Spirit has not abandoned us. We remember that grace is still at work, even when we cannot see it.

There are moments when our souls need to hear those truths from our own lips.

I have learned that discouragement often has a very short memory. It remembers today’s disappointment while forgetting yesterday’s faithfulness.

Fear has a way of shrinking our vision until all we can see is the problem standing in front of us. Hope does the opposite. Hope lifts our eyes. It reminds us that the God who has carried us before is still carrying us today.

That is why remembering is such a holy practice.

Throughout Scripture, God continually tells His people to remember. Remember the Exodus. Remember the covenant. Remember the wilderness. Remember the manna. Remember the cross. Remember the resurrection.

God knows something about us. We are quick to remember our failures and surprisingly quick to forget His faithfulness.

Psalm 42 invites us to become people who intentionally remember. Remember the prayers God has answered. Remember the peace that arrived when you thought it never would. Remember the strength that somehow appeared when yours was gone. Remember the people God placed in your path at exactly the right time. Remember the moments when you could not see a way forward, yet somehow God faithfully led you one step at a time.

Memory becomes fuel for hope. That does not mean every season will feel the same. There will still be dry seasons. There will still be questions. There will still be nights when tears become your food. There will still be mornings when

prayer feels difficult. There will still be moments when you wonder why God seems so quiet.

The Christian life is not the absence of drought. It is learning where to go when we are thirsty. That is why Jesus' invitation remains so beautiful. "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink."

Notice that He does not say, "If anyone has everything figured out..." "If anyone's faith is strong enough..." "If anyone has stopped doubting..."

He simply says, "If anyone is thirsty..." That invitation includes every one of us.

Because every one of us becomes thirsty sooner or later.

Some thirst because of grief. Others because of loneliness. Some because of unanswered prayer. Others because success has failed to satisfy. Some because life has fallen apart. Others because life seems strangely empty, even though everything appears to be going well. Our thirsts may look different.

The invitation remains the same.

Come to Jesus. Bring your questions. Bring your disappointments. Bring your fears. Bring your weariness. Bring your doubts. Bring your whole self.

He has never asked us to pretend. He has only asked us to come.

Perhaps that is the greatest encouragement Psalm 42 offers.

God is not frightened by our thirst. He is the One who awakens it. He is not offended by our questions. He welcomes honest hearts. He is not waiting for perfect faith before drawing near. He has already drawn near through Jesus Christ.

The longing you feel may actually be one of the deepest evidences of His grace.

C. S. Lewis once observed that earthly desires often point beyond themselves. Hunger points toward food. Weariness points toward rest. Thirst points toward water.

Perhaps our spiritual thirst points us toward the One for whom we were created all along.

Saint Augustine expressed it beautifully centuries earlier when he wrote, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

Psalm 42 would simply add, “Our souls are thirsty until they drink from the living God.”

As I reflect on this psalm, I find myself returning to one simple image.

A deer searching for water. Not because it has lost hope. Because it knows water exists. It keeps searching because somewhere beyond the next hill, there is a stream. The longing itself keeps it moving.

Perhaps that is what faith often looks like.

Not having every answer. Not always feeling God's presence. But continuing to seek Him because somewhere deep inside we know He alone is life. And the beautiful promise of the Gospel is this.

The stream we are searching for has already begun flowing toward us.

In Jesus Christ, the living water has entered our wilderness. He has stepped into our drought. He has walked through our deserts. He has stood beside our tears. He has conquered our death. He has risen so that every thirsty soul may drink deeply from the grace of God.

So if today you find yourself longing for God...Do not lose heart.

If your prayers feel weak...Do not stop praying.

If your faith feels fragile...Do not mistake fragile faith for absent faith.

Keep seeking. Keep trusting. Keep remembering. Keep hoping.

One day, the thirst will finally be satisfied. One day, faith will become sight. One day, every tear will be wiped away. One day, we will stand in the presence of the living God, never again wondering where He is.

Until that day...Hope in God.

For you shall again praise Him. Your help. Your Savior. Your God.

A Soul Song

There are seasons when the Christian life feels like standing beside a dry riverbed.

You remember what it was like when the water flowed. You remember moments when prayer felt natural, worship came easily, and God's presence seemed unmistakably near.

Then something changed.

Perhaps grief entered your life. Perhaps disappointment settled into your heart. Perhaps nothing dramatic happened at all. You simply woke up one day realizing your soul felt dry.

Psalms 42 reminds us that spiritual thirst is not something to hide.

It is something to bring before God.

The psalmist does not pretend he is satisfied.

He tells the truth. He longs. He remembers. He hopes.

That is the rhythm of mature faith.

Longing does not mean you have failed. It often means God is inviting you deeper.

Every season of dryness becomes another invitation to discover that Christ Himself is the living water your soul has always desired.

Do not be afraid of your thirst. Bring it to Jesus. He has never turned away a thirsty soul.

A Prayer to Sing

Living God,

You know my heart better than I know it myself.

You know the places where I am full of joy, and You know the places where I feel empty. You know the prayers I have spoken aloud and the ones I have only whispered in my heart. Nothing about me is hidden from You.

There are days when I feel like the deer searching for water. My soul is tired. My heart is weary. I find myself longing for something I cannot always describe. Thank You for

reminding me that my deepest need is not simply for easier circumstances, but for more of You.

Forgive me for the times I have tried to satisfy my soul with things that could never truly give life. I confess that I often search for peace in success, security in possessions, comfort in control, and hope in my own plans. Yet none of those things can satisfy the thirst You created within me.

Thank You for giving me a thirst that points me back to You.

Even when I cannot feel Your presence, help me trust Your promises. Even when my prayers seem unanswered, help me believe that You are listening. Even when tears become my food, remind me that Your steadfast love never leaves me.

Thank You for Jesus Christ, who entered our wilderness and experienced our thirst. Thank You that He knows loneliness, grief, disappointment, and suffering. Thank You that He cried, “I thirst,” so that I might one day drink deeply from the living water of Your grace.

Holy Spirit, continue awakening my heart.

Do not allow me to become satisfied with shallow things. Increase my desire for Christ. Teach me to hunger for holiness. Teach me to thirst for righteousness. Teach me to

delight in Your presence more than in anything this world can offer.

When discouragement comes, help me preach Your truth to my own soul. When fear grows louder than faith, remind me that You have never abandoned me. When I cannot see the stream, help me remember that You are already leading me toward it.

May my life become a continual search for You, until the day faith becomes sight and I stand forever in Your presence.

In the name of Jesus Christ, the Living Water,

Amen.

Practicing the Psalm This Week

Psalm 42 invites us to pay attention to our deepest desires.

Spend this week allowing your thirst to lead you toward Christ.

Identify Your Thirst

Take a few quiet moments to ask yourself, “What am I really longing for right now?”

Write your answer down.

Then ask another question. “Is this longing ultimately pointing me toward God, or am I trying to satisfy it somewhere else?”

Preach to Your Soul

Every morning this week, slowly read Psalm 42:11.

Then say it again in your own words. “Hope in God.”

Remind yourself of one way God has been faithful in your life.

Allow your own voice to become a reminder of God’s goodness.

Practice Honest Prayer

Spend ten minutes talking to God without trying to sound religious.

Tell Him exactly where you are. Tell Him what disappoints you. Tell Him what frightens you. Tell Him what you hope for. Then spend a few moments in silence, simply resting in His presence.

Drink Deeply

Read one of the Gospel accounts where Jesus offers living water.

Read it slowly.

Imagine yourself in the story.

Ask Christ to satisfy the deepest thirst of your soul.

Worship Through the Dryness

Even if you do not feel like singing this week, listen to a hymn or worship song that has carried you through difficult seasons.

Sometimes worship begins as an act of faith before it becomes an expression of joy.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are you thirsting for most deeply in this season of your life?
2. Have you ever mistaken another desire for your deepest spiritual thirst? What happened?
3. Why do you think God allows seasons when His presence feels hidden?
4. What encourages you most about the honesty of Psalm 42?
5. How does knowing that Jesus Himself experienced thirst change the way you read this psalm?
6. What does it mean for you to “preach to your own soul”?
7. When you look back over your life, where do you see God’s grace awakening your desire for Him?
8. How might your longing actually become one of God’s greatest gifts in your spiritual growth?

A Verse to Carry with You

“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for You, O God.” ~Psalm 42:1

Return to this verse throughout the week.

Whenever you become aware of anxiety, frustration, loneliness, or disappointment, quietly ask yourself, “What is my soul really thirsting for?”

Then allow that question to lead you back to Christ.

Remember...

Do not be afraid of your thirst. Do not mistake longing for failure. Do not believe the lie that dry seasons mean God has abandoned you.

The deepest thirsts of your heart were never meant to shame you. They were meant to lead you.

Every longing is an invitation. Every question is an opportunity to seek God more deeply. Every tear reminds you that this world cannot fully satisfy the soul God created.

Keep seeking. Keep praying. Keep hoping.

The stream is closer than you think. The Living Water is already seeking thirsty people.

And the One your soul longs for has promised that all who come to Him will never be turned away.

The Song in One Sentence: The deepest longing of the human soul is not a sign that God is absent, but an invitation to discover that He is nearer than we ever imagined.

5

How Long, O Lord? Learning to Trust the Gardener While You Wait Psalm 13

There is something almost mysterious about planting a seed.

You kneel beside a patch of freshly turned soil. In your hand is something so small you could almost overlook it. You press it gently into the earth, cover it with dirt, water it, and then...you wait.

Nothing happens.

The next morning you look again.

Still nothing.

A week passes.

Nothing.

Two weeks.

Nothing.

Three weeks.

Still nothing.

If someone had never planted a garden before, they might assume the seed had failed.

Maybe it died. Maybe the soil wasn't right. Maybe the gardener made a mistake.

After all, nothing can be seen.

But every gardener knows something the casual observer does not.

The most important work is happening where no one can see it.

Beneath the surface, the seed is changing. The hard shell begins to soften. Tiny roots quietly push their way through the darkness. They stretch downward before anything ever reaches upward.

Long before a single green shoot appears above the soil, the hidden work has already begun.

Roots always come before fruit.

That simple truth has helped me understand one of the shortest and most honest prayers in all of Scripture.

Psalm 13.

David writes this psalm from underground. He is not standing on a mountaintop celebrating victory. He is not dancing before the ark. He is not sitting confidently upon Israel's throne. Instead, he feels buried beneath circumstances he cannot understand.

God seems silent. His enemies seem stronger. Nothing appears to be changing.

If Psalm 8 invited us to stand beneath the stars in wonder, and Psalm 42 invited us to walk through the desert with our deepest thirst, Psalm 13 takes us beneath the ground.

It leads us into the darkness of waiting.

Every one of us eventually arrives there.

Perhaps it is a diagnosis that changes everything. Perhaps it is the loss of someone you love. Perhaps it is a marriage that slowly begins to unravel. Perhaps it is the child who keeps wandering farther from home. Perhaps it is depression that refuses to lift. Perhaps it is years of praying the same prayer without seeing the answer you hoped for.

Waiting has a way of making us question everything.

Not necessarily God's existence. But His timing. We begin asking questions we never imagined we would ask. How long, Lord? How much longer can this continue? How long until healing comes? How long until this relationship is restored? How long until the anxiety eases? How long until the grief becomes lighter? How long until I feel like myself again?

David asks those same questions.

Not once.

Four times.

“How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?”

Notice what David does not ask.

He never asks whether God exists. He already knows the answer. He never wonders whether God has the power to act. He has seen God's faithfulness before.

His struggle is not with God's ability. His struggle is with God's silence.

Many faithful believers experience seasons when heaven seems painfully quiet.

Prayer feels as though it rises no higher than the ceiling. The Bible that once felt alive suddenly feels difficult to read. Worship becomes harder. Joy becomes quieter. Hope becomes fragile.

David gives us permission to admit that those seasons exist.

He does not hide behind polished religious language. He does not pretend everything is fine. He brings God the truth.

That is one of the greatest gifts of the Psalms.

They remind us that faith does not require pretending.

Faith tells God the truth. Biblical lament is not unbelief. It is faith refusing to stop talking to God. In fact, there is something remarkably hopeful about David's questions.

Every "How long?" assumes that God is still listening. Every complaint assumes there is Someone worth complaining to. Every cry assumes Someone is able to answer.

That is why lament is not the opposite of faith. It is one of faith's deepest expressions.

Only someone who believes God cares continues crying out to Him.

David's questions reveal that his faith is wounded.

They do not reveal that it is dead.

Perhaps that is exactly where you find yourself today. You still believe. You still pray. You still worship. But you are tired. You are waiting. And if you are honest, you have whispered David's words more than once.

How long, O Lord?

David's first question is perhaps the hardest one to read. "How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever?"

If you have walked with God for very long, there is a good chance those words have crossed your mind, even if you never spoke them aloud.

Not because you stopped believing. Not because you wanted to abandon your faith. But because there were moments when God's silence seemed almost unbearable.

David is not accusing God of literally forgetting him.

The Hebrew language paints a more emotional picture than that.

To "forget" someone in the Old Testament often means to delay acting on their behalf. It is the painful feeling of being overlooked. It is the experience of wondering whether anyone notices your suffering.

Parents know this feeling from the other side.

A child falls asleep in the back seat of the car after a long day. The parent knows the child is there. The parent has not forgotten. Yet from the child's perspective, waking up alone in a parked car for even a moment can feel frightening.

Perspective changes everything. David feels forgotten. God has not forgotten him.

Many of us have lived in that tension. We pray faithfully. We wait patiently. We ask. We seek. We knock. Yet the answer seems delayed.

It is tempting to conclude that silence means absence.

David almost reaches that conclusion.

Then he asks another question. "How long will You hide Your face from me?"

Throughout Scripture, God's face represents His favor, His presence, and His blessing. When the priests blessed Israel, they prayed, "The Lord make His face shine upon you."

To experience God's smiling face was to know His presence. To feel that His face was hidden was to feel abandoned.

Notice again what David is really saying.

He is not asking, “Are You real?” He is asking, “Do You still delight in me?”

That question reaches much deeper.

I suspect many Christians quietly wrestle with it.

After repeated disappointments, unanswered prayers, or seasons of failure, we begin wondering whether God has somehow withdrawn His affection.

Perhaps He is disappointed. Perhaps He has grown weary of us. Perhaps we have exhausted His patience.

The enemy loves to whisper those lies into tired hearts. David understands that temptation.

He voices it honestly.

That honesty is important because hidden fears lose much of their power once they are brought into the light.

One of the healthiest things we can do in prayer is stop pretending. God is not impressed by polished prayers. He desires honest ones.

Some of the most faithful prayers you will ever pray may begin with uncomfortable words. “Lord, I don’t understand.” “Lord, I feel forgotten.” “Lord, I cannot see You.” “Lord, I don’t know how much longer I can do this.”

Those prayers are not signs of weak faith. They are often signs of a relationship that is strong enough to bear honesty. That is one of the reasons I appreciate David so much.

The Bible remembers him as a giant slayer. A king. A warrior. A poet. A man after God's own heart.

Yet here we meet a different David. A weary David. A frightened David. A man whose confidence has been shaken.

The same shepherd who once walked confidently toward Goliath now wonders how much longer he can endure.

That should encourage us.

Spiritual maturity does not eliminate seasons of discouragement. Even the greatest saints have prayed through tears. Even the strongest believers have wrestled with waiting. Even those who knew God intimately experienced moments when heaven seemed silent.

David continues, "How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?"

The Hebrew language is vivid. The idea is not simply sadness. It is carrying grief around like an unwanted companion.

Morning arrives. The sorrow is there. Evening comes. The sorrow is still there. Sleep offers only temporary relief before another day begins. Anxiety works that way. So does grief. So does depression.

They follow us through ordinary moments. We smile when we need to. We go to work. We attend church. We carry on conversations. Yet somewhere beneath the surface, the sorrow remains.

David refuses to hide that reality. Neither should we.

There is something deeply healing about discovering that Scripture gives us permission to tell the truth.

Not every prayer needs to sound triumphant. Not every worship service begins with celebration.

Sometimes faith simply says, “Lord, this hurts.” And sometimes that is enough.

David’s final question shifts his attention beyond his own heart. “How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?”

Whatever enemy David has in mind, it feels stronger than he does.

Perhaps you know that feeling. Sometimes the enemy has a name. Cancer. Addiction. Loneliness. Financial uncertainty. A broken relationship.

Sometimes the enemy is invisible. Fear. Shame. Regret. The quiet voice that keeps insisting nothing will ever change.

Whatever form it takes, the enemy always tries to convince us that it will have the final word.

David feels that pressure. He can almost hear the voices around him saying, “See? God isn’t going to help you.”

The waiting itself becomes another battlefield. Perhaps that is why waiting is one of the hardest parts of the Christian life.

Most of us can endure hardship if we know exactly when it will end. We can count down the days. We can prepare ourselves. We can see the finish line.

Waiting without knowing how long is different. That uncertainty slowly wears on the soul.

Like a seed buried beneath the soil, we cannot see what is happening.

We only know we are still underground.

And that is where Psalm 13 meets us.

Not after the answers have come. Not after everything has been resolved.

But right there in the darkness, where faith learns to keep reaching toward the light even before it can see it.

Then, almost quietly, everything changes.

Not because the enemy disappears. Not because the prayers are suddenly answered. Not because heaven opens and explains what God has been doing. Nothing in David's circumstances has changed. The waiting continues. The silence remains. The questions are still unanswered. Yet one small word shifts the entire direction of the psalm.

“But...”

I have come to love that word in Scripture. Again and again, it marks the place where grace interrupts despair.

The circumstances remain the same. But God. The future still feels uncertain. But God. The diagnosis is still real. But God. The grief still hurts. But God.

David writes, “But I have trusted in Your steadfast love.”

That sentence deserves to be read slowly.

David does not say, “I finally understand.”

He does not say, “I figured out what God was doing.” He does not say, “My prayers have been answered.”

He says, “I have trusted.”

Faith is not the absence of questions. Faith is choosing where those questions finally lead us.

David's questions lead him back to God's character.

That little phrase, "steadfast love," is one of the richest expressions in the entire Old Testament.

The Hebrew word is **hesed**.

We have encountered it several times already in our journey through the Psalms, but each time it shines with another facet of God's heart.

Hesed is covenant love. Faithful love. Unfailing love. Steadfast love. Persistent love. It is the kind of love that refuses to walk away. It is the love God freely chose to bind Himself to His people with.

Human covenants are often fragile. We promise until it becomes inconvenient. We stay until the relationship becomes difficult. We remain committed as long as it costs us very little.

God's covenant is altogether different.

His love does not depend on our consistency. It depends on His. That truth has carried believers through every generation.

Israel discovered it in the wilderness. The prophets proclaimed it during exile. David remembered it while hiding in caves. The disciples eventually understood it after

the resurrection. And we discover it every time we look to Jesus Christ.

Hesed means that God's commitment is stronger than our circumstances. It is stronger than our doubts. It is stronger than our failures. It is stronger than our fears.

David suddenly remembers something.

The evidence of God's love has never been His speed. The evidence of God's love is His faithfulness.

Most of us instinctively judge God's love by how quickly He answers our prayers.

If relief comes immediately, we conclude that God must love us. If the answer is delayed, we begin wondering whether His love has somehow diminished.

David gently turns that thinking upside down. He stops interpreting God's character through his circumstances. Instead, he begins interpreting his circumstances through God's character.

That is one of the greatest acts of faith a person can make.

Our circumstances change constantly. God's character never does. Feelings rise and fall. God remains faithful. Our understanding comes and goes. God's wisdom never changes. We may not know what tomorrow holds. But we know the One who holds tomorrow.

That is where hope begins.

I think back to that seed beneath the soil. If the seed could speak, I imagine it asking questions very much like David's. How long until I see the sun? How long until this darkness ends? Has the gardener forgotten where he planted me? Why am I still buried?

Those questions make perfect sense from the seed's perspective.

After all, all it can see is dirt. It cannot see the gardener. It cannot see the roots quietly spreading beneath the surface. It cannot see that every drop of water is accomplishing exactly what it was intended to do. It only knows that it has been waiting.

The gardener, however, sees something entirely different. He knows the roots must grow before the blossom appears. He knows strength is developing long before beauty becomes visible. He knows that if the plant grows upward before it grows downward, it will never survive the storms that are coming.

Roots always come before fruit.

That is true in gardens. It is also true in the spiritual life.

Some of God's deepest work happens beneath the surface. It happens where no one applauds. Where no one notices. Where no one even realizes anything is changing.

Character is taking root. Patience is growing. Humility is deepening. Compassion is being formed.

Faith is stretching downward into the faithfulness of God. The hidden seasons often produce the strongest Christians.

Looking back over my own life, I can honestly say that the seasons I would never choose are often the seasons God has used most.

Not because suffering is good. It isn't. Not because grief is enjoyable. It isn't. Not because waiting is easy. It certainly isn't.

But because those seasons have repeatedly taught me something I probably would never have learned any other way.

God really is enough. When everything else is stripped away...His presence remains. When all my plans unravel... His promises remain. When I cannot see the path ahead... His character remains.

Waiting has a way of exposing where our confidence truly rests. It reveals what we have been leaning upon all along. Sometimes we discover we have been trusting our own abilities more than God's grace. Sometimes we realize our security has quietly shifted toward our careers, our finances, our health, or even other people.

Waiting uncovers those hidden places. Not to shame us. But to invite us into a deeper trust.

Perhaps that is why David can finally say, “My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.”

Notice carefully what he rejoices in.

Not his escape. Not his victory. Not the defeat of his enemies.

He rejoices in God’s salvation. His confidence has moved away from the outcome he wants toward the God who saves.

That is a subtle shift.

It means our hope is no longer tied to one particular answer. Our hope is tied to the One who holds every answer. And that hope is strong enough to sustain us while we wait.

There is one more place in Scripture where everything seems buried.

It is not in the Psalms.

It is in a garden. On Friday afternoon, Jesus breathed His last. The sky grew dark. The earth trembled. The temple curtain was torn in two. Then His friends carried His

lifeless body to a borrowed tomb. A stone was rolled into place. And everything became quiet.

We know how the story ends. The disciples did not.

Try to imagine what Saturday felt like for them. No angels singing. No empty tomb. No resurrection appearances. No celebration. Only silence.

The One they had followed for three years was gone. The miracles had stopped. The crowds had disappeared. The cross seemed to have won.

If you had visited Jerusalem on that Saturday, you would not have seen much evidence that God was accomplishing the greatest work in human history.

All you would have seen was a sealed tomb. It looked like defeat. It looked like failure. It looked like death had the final word.

It looked exactly like Psalm 13.

How long, O Lord? Where are You now? Have You forgotten us? Have You hidden Your face?

The disciples had no idea that while they grieved, heaven was preparing resurrection.

God was not absent. God was working. Hidden from human eyes, but never absent. The silence of Saturday was not the

absence of God's activity. It was the place where redemption was taking root.

That is why I love the image of the seed so much.

Jesus Himself used it. In the Gospel of John He said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Jesus understood something we are still learning. Life often comes through burial. Resurrection often begins where everything appears finished. The seed disappears before it grows. The bulb is buried before it blooms. The caterpillar disappears before the butterfly emerges. The cross comes before the empty tomb.

Sometimes God's greatest work happens in places that look like endings.

I wonder how many times we have mistaken God's hidden work for God's absence. We assume that because we cannot see Him moving, He must not be moving at all.

But gardeners know better. The seed does not stop growing simply because it is hidden. It grows precisely because it is hidden.

The darkness is not its enemy. It is part of its transformation.

Could it be that some of the places we most wish to escape are the very places where God is forming us most deeply?

I know that is not easy to hear.

No one chooses suffering. No one asks for heartbreak. No one volunteers for seasons of waiting.

The Christian faith has never glorified pain for its own sake. Jesus Himself wept. He prayed in Gethsemane for another way. He understands our desire for relief. Yet the resurrection reminds us that God is able to bring life out of places that appear hopeless.

That does not mean every earthly story unfolds the way we want.

Some prayers remain unanswered this side of eternity. Some losses remain painfully real. Some wounds leave scars that stay with us for the rest of our lives.

The resurrection is not a promise that every hardship will disappear tomorrow.

It is the promise that hardship never has the final word. Death does not. Sin does not. Darkness does not. The enemy does not.

God does.

That is why David can end Psalm 13 in such a surprising way. “I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me.”

Those words almost seem out of place. Nothing has changed. The enemies are still present. The waiting continues. The questions remain. Yet David begins singing.

Why?

Because somewhere between verse four and verse five, he stopped measuring God’s faithfulness by his circumstances.

He remembered God’s character. That is mature faith.

Immature faith says, “I’ll praise God when everything works out.”

Growing faith says, “I’ll praise God because I know who He is, even while I wait.”

David is not ignoring reality. He is choosing which reality will shape him. The reality of his circumstances. Or the reality of God’s steadfast love.

He chooses God’s steadfast love. That choice changes everything. It does not remove the waiting. It transforms it.

Waiting is no longer empty. Waiting becomes holy ground. Waiting becomes the place where trust grows deeper than

understanding. Waiting becomes the place where roots stretch downward into the faithfulness of God.

Perhaps that is where you find yourself today.

You have prayed. You have waited. You have wondered how much longer. You cannot yet see what God is doing.

If that is where you are, let me gently remind you of something. The Gardener has not forgotten where He planted you. He knows exactly where you are. He sees every tear. He hears every prayer. He understands every question. He has not misplaced you. He has not abandoned you. He has not stopped working.

Roots are growing, even if you cannot yet see them.

One day the shoot will break through the soil. One day what has been hidden will become visible. One day you will look back and discover that God was faithfully working in places you could not yet imagine.

Until then, keep praying.

Keep trusting. Keep remembering His steadfast love. Keep singing, even if your voice trembles. Because the God who raised Jesus from the grave is still bringing life out of buried places.

And He is not finished with your story.

A Soul Song

Waiting is one of the hardest classrooms in the Christian life.

Most of us would gladly skip it. We would rather move from prayer to answer, from hurt to healing, from Friday to Sunday morning. But God often does some of His deepest work in the long Saturdays of life.

Waiting slows us down. It exposes the places where we have quietly trusted ourselves more than God. It uncovers our fears, our need for control, and our desire for immediate answers.

Yet waiting also gives us something we could receive no other way. It teaches us that God's presence is more dependable than our circumstances.

Psalm 13 reminds us that we do not have to pretend while we wait. We do not have to force a smile. We do not have to hide our tears. We do not have to feel guilty for asking difficult questions.

David teaches us another way.

Cry honestly. Remember faithfully. Trust God's steadfast love. Sing before the answer comes. That is not denial. That is hope.

Hope does not ignore reality. Hope looks directly at reality while refusing to believe it is the final chapter. Because of Jesus Christ, we know the ending of the story.

The cross was not the end. The tomb was not the end. Silence was not the end. Resurrection had already begun.

That same hope belongs to every follower of Christ.

The Gardener is still tending His garden. The roots are still growing. The hidden work is still taking place. And one day, in God's perfect time, what has been buried will bloom.

A Prayer for the Waiting

Faithful Father,

There are days when I understand David's words all too well. There are prayers I have prayed that still seem unanswered. There are questions that remain. There are burdens I cannot carry on my own. Sometimes I wonder how long I will have to wait.

Thank You for reminding me that You are not offended by my questions. Thank You for inviting me to bring You my fears instead of hiding them. Teach me to trust Your heart when I cannot trace Your hand.

When Your timing is different from mine, help me remember that Your love has never changed. When I

cannot see what You are doing, remind me that You are still working beneath the surface.

Grow deep roots of faith within me.

Shape my character. Strengthen my hope. Teach me to become the person You are forming while I wait for the answers I long to receive.

Thank You for Jesus Christ. Thank You that He entered our waiting. Thank You that He walked through suffering, endured the silence of the tomb, and rose again in victory. Because He lives, I know that death never has the final word. Neither does disappointment. Neither does grief. Neither does fear.

You alone have the final word.

Holy Spirit, help me trust the Gardener.

Help me believe that I have not been forgotten. Help me sing, even before I see the first signs of new life. I place my life into Your faithful hands.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen.

Practicing the Psalm This Week

Waiting does not have to be wasted.

This week, allow Psalm 13 to shape the way you wait.

Name Your “How Long”

Write down one area of your life where you have been asking,

“How long, O Lord?”

Do not edit your answer. Be completely honest. Bring that question to God each day this week.

Remember His Faithfulness

Make a list of five moments when God carried you through a difficult season.

Read the list every morning.

Let yesterday’s faithfulness strengthen today’s trust.

Spend Time in the Garden

If possible, spend a few minutes outside.

Look at flowers. Trees. Gardens. Seeds.

Notice how much of creation grows slowly.

Ask God to help you embrace His pace instead of demanding your own.

Practice “But”

Read Psalm 13 again.

Circle the word “But” in verse five.

Then write your own sentence.

“My circumstances are difficult...

But I trust Your steadfast love.”

Return to that sentence throughout the week.

Sing Anyway

Listen to a hymn or worship song that reminds you of God’s faithfulness.

Sing it, even if you do not feel like singing.

Sometimes praise becomes the bridge that carries us through the waiting.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are you waiting on God for in this season?

2. Which of David's four questions resonates most deeply with your own experience?
3. Why do you think Scripture gives us permission to lament instead of pretending everything is fine?
4. How has waiting shaped your character in ways you did not recognize at the time?
5. What does God's steadfast love, His *hesed*, mean to you personally?
6. Where have you mistaken God's silence for His absence?
7. How does the silence of Holy Saturday help you understand your own seasons of waiting?
8. What would it look like for you to "sing before the shoot breaks through the soil"?

A Verse to Carry with You

"But I trusted in Your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me." -Psalm 13:5-6

Read these verses every day this week.

Let them become your prayer until they become your song.

Remember...

The seed does not know how long it will remain beneath the soil. It simply continues receiving what the gardener provides.

The darkness is not punishment. It is preparation.

The waiting is not abandonment. It is formation.

The silence is not evidence that God has stopped working. It is often the place where His deepest work is taking place.

You may not yet see the roots. You may not yet see the growth. You may not yet see the answer.

But the Gardener has not forgotten where He planted you.

He is faithful. He is present. He is working.

And because of Jesus Christ, you can trust that one day every buried seed will bloom, every tear will be redeemed, and every “How long?” will finally become a song of praise.

The Song in One Sentence: God’s silence is never His absence, and the Gardener never forgets where He has planted His children.

6

God's Reign is Clothed in Beauty Psalm 45

Every family has certain stories they tell over and over again.

Stories about weddings and births. Stories about difficult seasons that somehow became testimonies of God's faithfulness. Stories about answered prayers, unexpected blessings, and moments when God showed up in ways no one could have anticipated. These stories become part of the family's identity. They remind each generation where they have come from and who has been walking with them all along.

The Psalms function much the same way for the people of God.

For thousands of years, these songs have been the prayer book of God's people. They have been sung in magnificent temples and whispered in lonely prison cells. They have echoed through joyful wedding celebrations and been spoken through tears beside fresh graves. They have given words to people who had none of their own.

That is one of the great gifts of the Psalms. They remind us that there is no season of life that cannot become a conversation with God.

Over the past several chapters, we have walked through several of those seasons together.

We began beneath a sky filled with stars in Psalm 8. Looking up into the vastness of creation, we were reminded that the God who spoke galaxies into existence also knows our names. We discovered that our worth does not come from what we accomplish but from the God who lovingly created us in His image.

In Psalm 33, we learned that the steadfast love of the Lord fills the entire earth. Even when the world feels unstable and uncertain, God's covenant love remains steady. We learned that trust is not built upon changing circumstances but upon the unchanging character of God.

Psalm 116 invited us into gratitude. We met a God who hears our cries, inclines His ear toward His children, and

delivers them in their time of need. The God of Scripture is not distant or indifferent. He listens. He responds. He saves.

Then came Psalm 42.

Perhaps one of the most honest prayers in all of Scripture.

"As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God."

There we learned that longing itself can become an act of grace. Sometimes the thirst we feel is evidence that God is already drawing us toward Himself. Even our deepest questions can become prayers.

Last came Psalm 13.

A prayer that many of us have prayed, whether we realized it or not.

"How long, O Lord?"

We discovered that faith is not pretending everything is fine. Faith is bringing our grief, our confusion, and our waiting into the presence of God. Lament is not the opposite of faith. It is faith refusing to let go.

Looking back over these Psalms, I am struck by something that I did not fully appreciate when we first began this journey.

The Psalms never ask us to leave our humanity at the door. They invite our whole selves into God's presence.

Wonder. Trust. Gratitude. Longing. Waiting. Joy. Questions. Hope. Fear. Nothing is excluded. God welcomes all of it.

Perhaps that is why the Psalms have remained beloved by God's people for nearly three thousand years. Every generation finds itself somewhere inside these songs. Every believer eventually discovers that one of these prayers has become their own.

And then we arrive at Psalm 45.

If I am being honest, the first time I looked ahead in preparing this series, I found myself smiling.

After all the tears...a wedding?

After all the lament...a wedding?

After all the waiting...a wedding?

It almost feels out of place.

The previous Psalms have taught us to cry, to wait, to thirst, to trust, and to hope. Suddenly, without warning, we are standing at a royal wedding listening to a poet whose heart is overflowing with joy.

At first glance, it almost seems like someone accidentally inserted the wrong song into the collection.

But the longer I sat with Psalm 45, the more I became convinced that it is exactly where it belongs. Because every honest prayer ultimately longs for communion. Every lament longs for reconciliation. Every cry for justice longs for a righteous King. Every thirsty soul longs to be united with the One who alone can satisfy. Every season we have walked through has been quietly preparing us for this moment.

Psalm 45 is often called a royal wedding psalm. It was almost certainly written to celebrate the marriage of one of Israel's kings. The poet describes the beauty of the king, the splendor of the bride, and the joy surrounding the celebration.

Yet almost immediately we begin to realize something remarkable. The language is simply too large. The king described here is too righteous. His reign is too perfect. His throne lasts too long. His kingdom is too beautiful.

The poet seems to be describing someone greater than any earthly ruler who has ever lived. That should not surprise us.

Throughout Israel's history, the greatest kings always left us wanting more.

David was a man after God's own heart, yet even David's story carries the scars of terrible failure. Solomon possessed extraordinary wisdom, yet his heart drifted

toward other gods. Generation after generation, kings came and kings went. Some were faithful. Many were not. Every one of them eventually died. The promises remained. The kings did not.

It is almost as though Psalm 45 refuses to settle for an ordinary king. It reaches beyond history itself. It points toward Someone still to come.

The opening verse captures that anticipation beautifully.

"My heart overflows with a goodly theme; I address my verses to the king; my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe."

What a wonderful way to begin.

The poet does not begin with duty. He does not begin with commands. He does not begin with theology. He begins with an overflowing heart.

Something he has seen has captured his imagination so completely that he cannot keep silent. His heart is overflowing. His words cannot come fast enough. His tongue races like the pen of a skilled writer trying desperately to keep up with what his heart is experiencing.

I love that image because I know exactly what he means.

There have been moments in my own life when I have tried to write down everything God has done, only to realize I could never finish the list.

I once heard a pastor friend of mine challenge his congregation to write down every blessing God had ever given them. Every answered prayer. Every unexpected provision. Every relationship. Every mercy. Every moment of grace.

He smiled and said, "See if you have enough paper."

You won't. There are not enough journals in the world. Not enough notebooks. Not enough computer files. Not enough pages to record every way God has been faithful.

When we begin to remember His goodness, our hearts start doing exactly what the psalmist describes.

They overflow.

And perhaps that is where this final chapter must begin. Not with another lesson. Not with another problem to solve. But with worship.

Because after all we have seen throughout these Psalms, after every question, every tear, every act of trust, every longing for God, our hearts are finally ready to behold the King Himself.

And once you truly see Him, it becomes impossible to remain unchanged.

The King Unlike Every Other

The poet's heart is overflowing because he has caught a glimpse of the King.

He writes, "You are the most handsome of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever."

At first, those words may sound like they are simply complimenting the king's appearance. But that is not what the Hebrew poet is doing.

The beauty he describes reaches much deeper than physical features.

The word translated "handsome" carries the idea of excellence, splendor, nobility, and moral beauty. This king is attractive because everything about him reflects goodness. His character is beautiful. His leadership is beautiful. His heart is beautiful.

And then the poet does something remarkable.

Before he tells us about the king's victories... Before he describes the king's throne... Before he mentions his authority...

He focuses on his words.

"Grace is poured upon your lips."

That phrase stopped me in my tracks the first time I studied this Psalm.

If I were writing about a king, I probably would have begun with his accomplishments. His military victories. His wisdom. His wealth. His palace. His influence.

The psalmist begins somewhere entirely different.

He begins with the king's speech. Why?

Because words reveal the heart.

Long before we know what kind of leader someone is, we discover it by listening to the way they speak.

Jesus would later say, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

The mouth simply reveals what already fills the heart.

Every kingdom has a language. Every kingdom has a vocabulary. The kingdoms of this world often speak with fear. They speak with threats. They speak with manipulation. Sometimes they speak with promises they have no intention of keeping. Sometimes they speak by shaming their enemies. Sometimes they speak by dividing people into opposing camps.

Power has a way of changing how people speak.

History is filled with rulers whose words wounded far more than they healed.

We have seen it throughout every generation.

Leaders who demanded loyalty but never earned trust.

Kings who accumulated power but neglected justice.

Governments that promised peace while creating fear.

Empires built upon intimidation. And if we are honest, we have grown accustomed to it.

Perhaps we have lived under broken kingdoms for so long that we have forgotten what true leadership actually looks like.

I think that is one reason Psalm 45 feels almost unbelievable.

We read it and wonder if such a king could ever exist. A king whose words are always gracious. A ruler who never manipulates. A leader who never lies. A sovereign whose authority is exercised through truth, righteousness, and mercy.

Could anyone really lead like that?

I remember thinking about this while standing in line at a store one afternoon.

The cashier smiled. She greeted every customer warmly. She thanked each person as they left. She was patient with an elderly couple who struggled to find their payment.

When I walked out, I caught myself thinking, "That was exceptional customer service."

Then another thought occurred to me.

No.

That was simply kindness. It only seemed exceptional because we have grown so accustomed to something less. The standard has quietly drifted downward. Mediocrity has become normal. Simple kindness surprises us.

I wonder if something similar has happened spiritually.

Perhaps we have lived among broken leaders for so long that genuine righteousness feels almost impossible. Maybe we have spent so much time watching power be abused that we struggle to imagine power being exercised with humility. Maybe we have heard so many careless words that grace flowing from someone's lips sounds almost unrealistic.

Yet the poet refuses to lower his expectations.

He has seen something different. He has seen a King whose greatness is measured not merely by what He accomplishes but by who He is.

That is why he continues. "Gird your sword upon your thigh, O mighty one, in your glory and majesty. In your majesty ride forth victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness."

Those words would have startled the ancient world.

Kings rode into battle to expand borders. To conquer enemies. To build their reputations. To increase their wealth.

This King rides into battle for entirely different reasons. Truth. Meekness. Righteousness.

Think about those three words for a moment.

Truth. Not convenience. Not propaganda. Not whatever happens to gain the greatest advantage. Truth. The kind of truth that remains true whether people applaud it or reject it. The kind of truth that sets people free.

Then comes meekness. That word often gets misunderstood. Meekness is not weakness. It is strength completely surrendered to God. It is power under control. It is the confidence that no longer needs to prove itself. The strongest people in the room are often the quietest. They have nothing to defend because they already know who they are.

Finally, righteousness. Not self-righteousness. Not moral superiority. Righteousness is life lived exactly as God

intended. It is justice. Integrity. Faithfulness. Wholeness. Everything in right relationship with God and with one another.

Can you imagine living under a kingdom like that? A kingdom where truth is never sacrificed for popularity. A kingdom where humility is valued more highly than domination. A kingdom where righteousness matters more than winning.

I think every human heart longs for that kingdom, even if we cannot always describe it.

We long for leaders we can trust. We long for justice that is not selective. We long for mercy that is not weak. We long for goodness that lasts.

Deep down, we long for a King like this.

Yet as wonderful as these words are, there is still a problem. No king in Israel's history fully fits this description. David came close in many ways, but not completely. Solomon possessed remarkable wisdom, yet his divided heart eventually divided the kingdom itself. Every faithful king eventually stumbled. Every righteous ruler eventually died.

The promises of Psalm 45 continued echoing long after each earthly king had passed away. Generation after generation, God's people kept singing this wedding song.

And perhaps, with each passing century, they began asking themselves the same question.

Who is this King? Who is the One whose words are always filled with grace? Who is the One whose throne truly lasts forever? Who is the One who loves righteousness without compromise? Who is the King beautiful enough to satisfy the deepest longings of every human heart?

The answer was coming.

History simply had not reached Bethlehem yet.

The King the Psalms Were Waiting For

One of the remarkable things about the Old Testament is that it often asks questions before it gives answers.

It plants seeds long before the harvest comes. It creates expectations that history itself cannot satisfy.

Psalm 45 is one of those places.

For centuries, God's people sang these words. They sang them at royal weddings. They celebrated the covenant God had made with David's family. They prayed that each new king might rule with justice and faithfulness. Yet every generation eventually experienced the same disappointment.

The king grew old. The king failed. The king died. The promises remained. History moved forward.

The Psalm continued waiting.

When the earliest followers of Jesus began reading the Scriptures after His resurrection, something extraordinary happened. They did not simply discover a collection of predictions about Jesus. They discovered that the entire story of Israel had been quietly preparing the world for Him.

Promises suddenly made sense. Patterns became clear. Questions found their answers.

Psalm 45 was one of those moments.

The writer of Hebrews wanted to explain who Jesus truly is. He could have quoted dozens of passages from the Old Testament, but under the guidance of the Holy Spirit he chose this royal wedding song.

He writes, "But of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.'"

There it is.

The King finally has a name.

Jesus.

Suddenly, everything the psalmist wrote becomes larger than Israel's monarchy. The gracious words. The everlasting throne. The righteous kingdom. The perfect King.

The poet was not exaggerating. He was anticipating. What generations had hoped for finally appeared in the person of Jesus Christ.

Go back and read the Gospels with Psalm 45 in your mind.

Notice what people experienced whenever Jesus spoke. Fishermen left their nets because grace flowed from His lips. A tax collector climbed down from a tree because grace flowed from His lips. A woman caught in adultery found forgiveness because grace flowed from His lips. Children climbed into His lap because grace flowed from His lips. The weary found rest because grace flowed from His lips. The broken found healing because grace flowed from His lips.

Even when Jesus corrected people, His purpose was never humiliation. His purpose was restoration.

That does not mean His words were always easy. Sometimes grace tells hard truths. Sometimes love confronts sin. Sometimes mercy exposes what pride tries to hide. But even His strongest rebukes were invitations to repentance.

Think about Nicodemus. Think about Peter. Think about Martha. Think about the rich young ruler.

Jesus always spoke truth.

Yet He never stopped loving the people to whom He spoke. Truth and grace were never enemies in Him. John tells us that Jesus came "full of grace and truth." Not half of one and half of the other.

Completely full of both.

The kingdoms of this world often force us to choose.

Truth without grace becomes harsh. Grace without truth becomes sentimental. Jesus refuses to separate them.

His truth heals because it is spoken in love. His grace transforms because it refuses to leave us where we are.

That is the kind of King Psalm 45 celebrates.

The more we watch Jesus throughout the Gospels, the more we realize that His greatness is unlike anything the world has ever imagined.

Earthly rulers demand to be served. Jesus kneels with a towel around His waist. Earthly rulers protect their position. Jesus gives away His life. Earthly rulers gather power. Jesus gathers people. Earthly rulers often make themselves inaccessible.

Jesus continually welcomes those everyone else overlooked. The poor. The sick. The lonely. The sinner. The outsider. The child.

Again and again, the Gospels present us with a King who exercises authority through compassion.

His miracles reveal His power. His mercy reveals His heart. Perhaps that is why people were continually drawn to Him.

Not because He lowered God's standards. He certainly did not. He simply embodied God's holiness in a way that invited people rather than pushing them away.

Holiness became beautiful. Righteousness became attractive. Mercy became irresistible. That is still true today.

The more clearly we see Jesus, the less interested we become in every counterfeit kingdom that competes for our allegiance.

The kingdoms of success eventually disappoint us. The kingdom of comfort eventually leaves us empty. The kingdom of power always demands more than it gives. The kingdom of self eventually collapses under its own weight.

Only the Kingdom of Christ continues to expand without diminishing those who belong to it. Only His Kingdom grows by giving rather than taking. Only His Kingdom is built through sacrificial love. Only His Kingdom is led by a King who wears both a crown and scars.

As I reflected on Psalm 45, I found myself asking a simple question.

When was Jesus most beautiful?

There are many possible answers. Perhaps at Bethlehem, where heaven itself broke into song as the Son of God entered the world. Perhaps on the Mount of Transfiguration, where His glory shone brighter than the sun and His disciples caught a glimpse of His divine majesty. Perhaps on Easter morning, when He walked out of the tomb and forever changed history.

Each of those moments is breathtaking.

Each reveals something magnificent about who Jesus is.

But I have become convinced that His beauty shines most brilliantly somewhere else. Not where His glory appeared strongest. But where His love was revealed most completely.

It happened on a hill outside Jerusalem. At a place called Golgotha. At the cross.

Because there, the Beautiful King showed us what true beauty has always been.

Beauty on a Cross

At first glance, the cross does not look beautiful. It looks brutal. It looks like injustice. It looks like failure.

If someone had been standing outside Jerusalem on that Friday afternoon with no knowledge of what was about to happen, they would never have guessed they were witnessing the greatest victory in the history of the world.

They would have seen a condemned man. A Roman execution. Another life crushed beneath the machinery of an empire.

Nothing about Golgotha appeared majestic. Nothing about it looked like Psalm 45.

The psalm speaks of ivory palaces. Jesus hangs from rough timber. The psalm describes fragrant robes woven with myrrh, aloes, and cassia. Roman soldiers strip Jesus of His garments and gamble for His clothing beneath the cross. The psalm celebrates a royal crown. Jesus wears a crown made from thorns. The psalm speaks of triumph. The cross appears to announce defeat.

Everything seems backwards.

And yet, the longer we stand at the foot of the cross, the more we begin to realize that God's definition of beauty has always been different from ours.

We are naturally drawn toward strength that dominates. God reveals strength that serves. We admire those who rise above everyone else. Jesus kneels to wash dirty feet. We celebrate those who win. Jesus gives Himself away.

The kingdoms of this world define beauty by appearance, success, influence, and power. The Kingdom of God defines beauty by love.

Perhaps that is why the New Testament spends so much time pointing us toward the cross. It is there that we finally see what the psalmist could only glimpse from a distance.

The Beautiful King is beautiful because of His heart. His character. His compassion. His unwavering love for the people He came to save.

The poet told us that grace flowed from the King's lips.

Watch Jesus during His final hours.

Even while carrying the weight of the world's sin, grace continues to flow from Him.

As soldiers nail Him to the cross, He prays, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Grace still flows from His lips. A thief hanging beside Him asks to be remembered. Jesus answers, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." Grace still flows from His lips. Looking down at His mother and the disciple whom He loved, Jesus creates a

new family even while His own life is slipping away. Grace still flows from His lips.

Finally, He declares, "It is finished." Not words of defeat. Words of completion. The work the Father had given Him was accomplished. Grace still flows from His lips.

The cross reveals something astonishing. Jesus never stopped being the King. His crown looked different. His throne looked different. His victory looked different.

But He was reigning even there.

He was conquering the oldest enemies humanity has ever known. Not Rome. Sin. Not Caesar. Death. Not political oppression. The brokenness that had entered creation in the Garden of Eden itself.

The kings of this world secure their kingdoms by asking others to die for them. Jesus establishes His Kingdom by dying for others.

No earthly ruler has ever loved like that. No earthly king has ever exercised authority quite like that.

Power gives. Power forgives. Power lays itself down.

That is the beauty of Christ.

It is love in its purest form.

The Apostle Paul would later write that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Notice the timing. Not after we became worthy. Not after we finally got our lives together. Not after we proved our loyalty.

While we were still far from Him. Grace arrived first.

This is one of the deepest convictions of the Wesleyan understanding of God's grace.

God always moves first.

Long before we began searching for Him, He was searching for us. Long before we ever loved Him, He loved us. Long before we called His name, He had already called ours.

The cross is not God's last-minute attempt to rescue humanity. It is the fullest revelation of the heart of God.

The God who has been pursuing His people since the opening pages of Genesis finally reveals the depth of His love in Jesus Christ.

When Adam and Eve hid in shame, God came looking for them. When Israel wandered, God pursued them through covenant. When the prophets called people home, God patiently waited for their return. And when the fullness of time had come, God Himself stepped into our story.

Not to condemn. To redeem.

Not to destroy. To restore.

The cross forever settles one of the deepest questions every human heart eventually asks.

Does God really love me?

Life does not always answer that question clearly.

Circumstances certainly do not.

There are seasons when prayers seem unanswered. There are moments when suffering clouds our vision. There are days when God feels painfully silent. But whenever those questions arise, Christians do not begin by looking at their circumstances.

We begin by looking at the cross. Because the cross answers with unmistakable clarity.

Yes.

God loves you.

Not because life is easy. Not because suffering disappears. Not because every prayer receives the answer we hoped for. But because the Son of God stretched out His hands and gave Himself for you.

That love cannot be improved upon. It cannot be increased. It cannot become more complete than it already is.

When I think about Psalm 45 now, I realize the poet was right all along.

There has never been a King like this. No one speaks as He speaks. No one loves as He loves. No one reigns as He reigns. No one gives as He gives.

The beauty of Jesus is not merely something we admire. It is something that transforms us.

The more we behold Him, the more we begin to understand what real greatness looks like.

And something remarkable begins to happen.

Without even realizing it, we slowly begin to resemble the One we have been looking at.

That has always been God's desire.

Not simply that we would worship the Beautiful King. But that, by His grace, we would become more like Him.

Becoming Like the King

There is an old saying that we become what we behold.

Whether or not those exact words are ancient, the truth behind them certainly is.

What captures our attention eventually shapes our imagination. What shapes our imagination eventually influences our desires.

Our desires begin directing our decisions. And over time, our decisions become our character.

That is why Scripture is so concerned with what we fix our eyes upon.

The Apostle Paul writes, "Set your minds on things that are above." The writer of Hebrews urges us to "fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." Even the Psalms continually lift our gaze away from ourselves and toward God.

We become what we behold.

Every kingdom understands this.

The kingdoms of this world constantly compete for our attention because they know that attention shapes allegiance.

Advertising invites us to behold possessions. Politics invites us to behold power. Social media invites us to behold image. Success invites us to behold achievement. Fear invites us to behold everything that might go wrong.

None of these things are neutral.

They slowly shape the people we become.

If we spend our lives beholding anxiety, we slowly become anxious. If we spend our lives beholding outrage, we slowly become angry. If we spend our lives beholding ourselves, we slowly become self-centered.

The object of our attention forms the direction of our lives.

That is why Psalm 45 is so important.

It does not merely tell us information about the King. It invites us to look at Him. To linger. To admire. To worship.

The psalmist's heart overflowed because he spent time beholding a King whose beauty exceeded anything he had ever known.

The same invitation stands before us today.

Look at Jesus.

Watch Him touch lepers no one else would touch. Watch Him welcome children whom everyone else overlooked. Watch Him stop for blind beggars while crowds hurried Him along. Watch Him forgive sinners who believed their lives were beyond repair. Watch Him speak truth without cruelty. Watch Him extend mercy without compromising

holiness. Watch Him pray for His enemies. Watch Him carry His cross. Watch Him walk out of the empty tomb.

This is what true humanity looks like. This is what holiness looks like. This is what love looks like.

The more we behold Christ, the more our lives begin to take on His shape.

This is not accomplished through willpower alone. It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

John Wesley called this sanctifying grace. Grace that not only forgives us but transforms us. Grace that not only rescues us but reshapes us. Grace that slowly conforms us into the image of Jesus Christ.

This transformation rarely happens all at once.

Like roots growing beneath the soil, much of God's work is hidden before it becomes visible. We usually notice it only by looking backward. We discover that we forgive more quickly than we once did. We respond with greater patience.

Our compassion deepens. Our pride loosens its grip. Our fears no longer control us as completely as they once did.

We begin loving people we previously ignored. We become more generous. More humble. More joyful. Not because we

have become impressive people. But because we have spent time with an impressive Savior.

The Apostle Paul describes Christians as "the aroma of Christ."

That image has always fascinated me.

An aroma lingers.

Long after someone leaves a room, their fragrance often remains.

Psalm 45 describes the King's robes as fragrant with myrrh, aloes, and cassia.

Paul says that now the Church carries the fragrance of Christ into the world.

Where forgiveness is offered, the fragrance of Christ lingers. Where mercy triumphs over revenge, the fragrance of Christ lingers. Where truth is spoken with gentleness, the fragrance of Christ lingers. Where broken people are welcomed instead of rejected, the fragrance of Christ lingers.

People may not immediately understand why something feels different. But they sense that another Kingdom has entered the room.

That is our calling.

The Church does not simply exist to tell people about Jesus. We exist to reflect Jesus. To become living witnesses to His beauty. To allow His grace to flow through our lips as it flowed through His. To become people whose lives quietly announce,

"The King is still reigning."

This is why discipleship matters.

Not because God needs better behaved people. But because the world desperately needs to see what the reign of Christ actually looks like.

Every act of kindness. Every word of forgiveness. Every moment of humility. Every sacrifice made in love. Every cup of cold water given in Jesus' name. Every patient conversation. Every faithful prayer. Every hidden act of service.

Each one becomes a small glimpse of the Kingdom that Psalm 45 celebrates.

The Beautiful King continues to reign.

And through the power of the Holy Spirit, His beauty is still transforming ordinary people into extraordinary witnesses of His grace.

That is the Church at its best. Not perfect people. People who have spent enough time beholding Jesus that others begin to catch a glimpse of Him through their lives.

And that brings us, fittingly, to the place where every journey with Christ leads.

It brings us to His table.

The Wedding Feast Has Already Begun

It is no accident that Psalm 45 is a wedding song. From beginning to end, Scripture is filled with the language of covenant, marriage, and faithful love.

The Bible begins with a wedding in a garden. Adam and Eve stand together in the presence of God as creation itself rejoices in the goodness of what God has made.

Then sin enters the story, and from that moment forward the rest of Scripture becomes the story of a faithful Bridegroom pursuing an often-unfaithful bride.

The prophets describe Israel as God's beloved, even when she wanders.

Jesus calls Himself the Bridegroom. Paul describes the Church as the Bride of Christ. And the final pages of Revelation end not with a battle, but with a wedding.

"The marriage of the Lamb has come."

History itself is moving toward a celebration. Toward a feast. Toward a home where every longing is finally satisfied.

Psalm 45 sits right in the middle of that story.

At first, it appears to celebrate the wedding of an earthly king.

But as we read it through the light of Christ, we discover that it has always been pointing beyond itself. It has been preparing us for the day when the King would come for His people.

That changes how we read one of the more difficult lines in the psalm.

"Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house." At first glance, those words can sound harsh.

Surely God is not asking the bride to forget everyone she has ever loved. That is not the point.

Marriage always creates a new allegiance.

Not because the old relationships no longer matter, but because a new identity has begun.

The bride is leaving one household in order to establish another. She is not losing herself. She is discovering who she truly is.

The same is true for every disciple of Jesus. Following Christ has never meant simply adding Him to an already busy life. It means allowing Him to become Lord over every part of our lives.

Our identity is no longer determined by our failures. Our worth is no longer measured by our accomplishments. Our future is no longer defined by our fears.

We belong to another Kingdom. We belong to another King.

This has been the pattern throughout our journey in the Psalms.

In Psalm 8 we learned that our identity comes from the God who crowned humanity with glory and honor.

In Psalm 33 we learned to trust God's steadfast love instead of the unstable kingdoms of this world.

In Psalm 116 we discovered that we belong to the God who hears our cries.

In Psalm 42 we learned that our deepest thirst is really for Him.

In Psalm 13 we learned that even our waiting belongs to Him.

Now Psalm 45 gathers all of those lessons together and asks one final question: To whom do you belong?

That question matters because everyone belongs to some kingdom.

Some people belong to the kingdom of success. Others to the kingdom of comfort. Some serve the kingdom of approval. Others devote themselves to the kingdom of security.

Many of us move back and forth between them, hoping one of them will finally satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts.

But every earthly kingdom eventually disappoints.

Only Christ offers a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. Only Christ reigns forever. Only Christ gives Himself rather than demanding that others give everything for Him. And that is why the Christian life is never about earning our place in His Kingdom.

It is about receiving the invitation that has already been extended.

The Bridegroom has already come looking for us. Grace always moves first.

Long before we ever thought about following Christ, Christ was already pursuing us. Long before we loved Him, He loved us. Long before we sought Him, He came seeking us.

That has been true from the very beginning.

Adam hid. God came looking. Israel wandered. God pursued. The prophets called. God remained faithful. Humanity rebelled. Christ came. Grace has always made the first move.

That is why salvation is never our achievement. It is always God's gift.

Every time we gather around the Lord's Table, we remember that gift. Communion is far more than remembering something Jesus did long ago. It is a foretaste of the wedding feast that is still to come. The bread reminds us that the Bridegroom gave His own body for His Bride. The cup reminds us that the covenant was sealed by His blood.

Every celebration of Holy Communion whispers the same promise: "The wedding feast is coming."

One day faith will become sight. One day longing will become joy. One day every lament will become praise. One day every tear will be wiped away. One day every prayer will be answered. One day every promise will be fulfilled.

And on that day, the King whose beauty captivated the psalmist will welcome His people home.

Until then, every time we gather at His Table, heaven breaks into earth for just a moment.

The feast has not yet arrived in its fullness. But the invitations have already gone out.

The King is already welcoming His people.

And every time we receive the bread and the cup, we are reminded that we are not merely remembering the past.

We are rehearsing for eternity.

Behold the King

As I look back over this journey through the Psalms, I find it remarkable where God has led us.

We began beneath a sky full of stars.

We stood with David in wonder as we looked at the heavens and asked, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them?"

From there we learned to trust the steadfast love of the Lord that fills the whole earth.

We discovered that God hears our cries.

We learned that it is okay to thirst for God and to lament honestly when life hurts.

We discovered that waiting is not wasted because God is often doing His deepest work beneath the surface.

And now we end where every one of those psalms has quietly been pointing all along.

To the King.

The more I have reflected on these six psalms, the more convinced I have become that they are not simply six isolated songs. They are six invitations into a deeper walk with God.

Wonder teaches us humility. Trust teaches us dependence. Gratitude teaches us remembrance. Longing teaches us desire. Lament teaches us honesty. And beholding Christ teaches us who we are becoming.

That is the Christian life.

Walking with God. Not sprinting ahead of Him. Not standing still. Walking.

Sometimes with confidence. Sometimes limping. Sometimes rejoicing. Sometimes weeping. Sometimes asking questions. Sometimes singing with overflowing hearts. But always walking with the One who walks with us.

That is what has struck me most as I have spent these weeks living in the Psalms.

God never asks us to pretend. He never tells us to hide our tears. He never rebukes us for bringing Him our fears, our disappointments, our confusion, or our longing. Instead, He invites us to bring our whole selves into His presence.

Every emotion. Every question. Every hope. Every sorrow.

Because every part of our lives is transformed as we behold Him.

Perhaps that is why Psalm 45 ends this section of our journey so beautifully.

The psalmist begins by saying, "My heart overflows..."

After everything we have seen throughout these psalms, that makes perfect sense. How could it not overflow? When you have stood beneath the stars and discovered that the Creator knows your name... When you have learned that His steadfast love fills the earth... When you have experienced Him hearing your cry... When you have found Him in your thirst... When you have trusted Him in the silence... And when you have finally seen the beauty of the King...

What else could your heart do?

It overflows.

Not because life has become easy. Not because every prayer has already been answered. Not because suffering has disappeared. But because Jesus is still King.

His throne still stands. Grace still flows from His lips. His steadfast love still endures forever. And His Kingdom is still coming.

As I close this book, I want to leave you with the same invitation that has quietly echoed through every chapter.

Take time to walk with God.

Look up at the stars. Watch the sunrise. Listen for His voice in Scripture. Bring Him your gratitude. Bring Him your tears. Bring Him your doubts. Bring Him your thirst. Bring Him your waiting. And then lift your eyes to Jesus.

Before you begin scrolling through the news each morning...Behold the King.

Before fear tells you what kind of day you are going to have...Behold the King.

Before anxiety convinces you that everything depends on you...Behold the King.

Before success or failure tells you who you are...Behold the King.

For we truly do become what we behold.

As we behold Christ, we begin to speak with greater grace. We begin to love more deeply. We begin to forgive more freely. We begin to trust more fully. We begin to hope more confidently. We begin to resemble the King we love.

And one day, our walk with God will become something even greater.

Faith will become sight. Hope will become fulfillment.

The songs we have sung through tears will become songs of unending joy.

The King we have followed by faith will stand before us face to face.

Until that day, may we continue walking. Walking with wonder. Walking with trust. Walking with gratitude. Walking with honesty. Walking with hope. Walking with Jesus.

And may our hearts, like the psalmist's, overflow with praise because we have seen the beauty of the King.

"O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth."

"The earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD."

"I love the LORD, because he heard my voice."

"As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God."

"But I have trusted in your steadfast love."

"My heart overflows... I address my verses to the King."

May those songs become our songs. May those prayers become our prayers. May those truths shape our lives.

And may we keep walking with God until the day we hear the voice of our Beautiful King say, **"Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your Lord."**

A Final Blessing

Before we part ways, allow me to leave you with one final prayer.

Not because our journey with God is ending. But because it is continuing.

The pages of this book may come to an end, but your walk with God does not. Tomorrow morning there will be new mercies. There will be new opportunities to trust. There will be new reasons to wonder. There may also be new questions.

New tears. New prayers whispered in the quiet before dawn.

Wherever you find yourself, remember this: The God of Psalm 8 still knows your name.

The God of Psalm 33 still surrounds the earth with His steadfast love.

The God of Psalm 116 still inclines His ear toward those who cry out to Him.

The God of Psalm 42 still meets thirsty souls.

The God of Psalm 13 is still at work beneath the surface, even when all you can see is dirt.

And the Beautiful King of Psalm 45 still reigns. His throne has not been shaken. His grace has not run dry. His mercy has not reached its limit. His invitation has not been withdrawn. He is still calling people to Himself. He is still transforming hearts. He is still making all things new.

So when life feels overwhelming, return to these songs.

Pray them.

Sing them.

Sit quietly with them.

Allow them to become the language of your own soul.

For centuries, believers before us have found strength in these same words. Kings have prayed them. Widows have prayed them. Children have prayed them. Martyrs have prayed them. Missionaries have prayed them. People standing beside hospital beds have prayed them. Parents waiting for prodigal children have prayed them. Saints taking their final breath have prayed them.

The Psalms have carried generations of God's people because they continually carry us back to God Himself. That has always been their purpose. Not simply to teach us about God. But to lead us into communion with Him.

As John Wesley often reminded the early Methodists, Christianity is not merely right thinking. It is life with God. It is growing in grace. It is loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. It is being transformed from the inside out until the image of Christ is increasingly reflected in us.

That is the journey.

That is what it means to walk with God.

And if there is one thing I hope you remember long after you have closed this book, it is this: God is always the One who makes the first move.

He came looking for Adam in the garden. He called Abraham out of Ur. He met Moses in a burning bush. He pursued Israel through wilderness after wilderness. He spoke through the prophets. He came near in Jesus Christ. He sent His Holy Spirit. And even now, He continues to seek, to call, to forgive, to restore, and to make holy.

Our walk with God is possible only because God first walked toward us. Grace has always gone ahead of us. Grace walks beside us. Grace will carry us home.

So keep walking.

When the sky is clear, walk in wonder. When life feels uncertain, walk in trust. When your prayers are answered, walk in gratitude. When your soul is thirsty, keep walking

toward the Living Water. When the darkness seems long,
keep walking by faith. When the road is difficult, keep your
eyes on the Beautiful King.

He knows the way. He is the way. And He has promised that
He will never leave you or forsake you.

One day, the walk will be over. Not because our story ends.
But because it reaches its fulfillment.

The journey of faith will give way to the joy of sight. The
prayers of longing will become songs of praise. The
wilderness will become home. The table will become the
banquet. The Bride will see the Bridegroom face to face.

And every step we have taken by faith will be swallowed up
in the joy of His presence.

Until that day, walk closely. Walk honestly. Walk thankfully.
Walk expectantly. Walk humbly. Walk joyfully. Walk with
God.

Amen.

"Enoch walked with God."* (Genesis 5:24)

"Noah walked with God."* (Genesis 6:9)

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good... to do justice, to
love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."* (Micah
6:8)

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."* (John 14:6)

May the God who has walked with His people from the very beginning continue to walk with you until the day you see Him face to face.

7

Conclusion Keep Walking

There is something beautiful about taking a walk with someone you love.

You do not remember every word that was spoken. You probably could not reconstruct every conversation. But somehow, by simply walking together, you come to know one another more deeply.

The pace is slower. The distractions begin to fade. Silence is no longer awkward.

You begin noticing things you would have missed if you had hurried past them.

That has always been God's desire. Not merely that we would know facts about Him. Not merely that we would attend church, read Scripture, or say our prayers, as important as those things are.

His desire has always been that we would walk with Him.

The Bible tells the story of people who learned exactly that.

Enoch walked with God. Noah walked with God. Abraham left everything familiar because he trusted the God who was leading him somewhere he had never been. Israel learned to follow God one day at a time through the wilderness. The disciples left their fishing nets simply to walk behind Jesus. And after the resurrection, two discouraged followers found themselves walking down the road to Emmaus, not realizing that Christ Himself had joined them.

That story has always captivated me.

They thought they were walking alone. They weren't. Jesus had been beside them the entire time.

Perhaps that is the greatest lesson of this book. Not that we have learned six psalms. Not that we have gathered a little more biblical knowledge. Not even that we have become better at praying.

The greatest lesson is this: God has never stopped walking toward us.

Long before we ever thought about seeking Him, He was seeking us. Long before we ever called His name, He had already called ours. Long before we ever loved Him, He loved us first.

Grace is not simply God's willingness to forgive. Grace is God's determination to remain with us. Grace found Adam hiding in the garden. Grace followed Israel into the wilderness. Grace became flesh in Jesus Christ. Grace poured itself out upon the cross. Grace walked out of the empty tomb. Grace came again in the Holy Spirit. And grace continues walking beside us today.

As I think back through these pages, I realize every chapter has really been telling the same story from a different angle.

Psalms 8 taught us to walk in wonder. To lift our eyes toward the heavens and remember both how small we are and how deeply loved we are.

Psalms 33 taught us to walk in trust. To believe that God's steadfast love fills the earth, even when headlines tell a different story.

Psalms 116 taught us to walk in gratitude. To remember that the God who heard our cries has never stopped listening.

Psalms 42 taught us to walk with holy longing. To bring our thirst honestly before the only One who can satisfy it.

Psalms 13 taught us to walk through waiting. To trust that while we are buried beneath circumstances we cannot understand, God is still growing roots beneath the surface.

And Psalm 45 invited us to behold the Beautiful King.
Because we become like the One we continually look
toward.

Wonder.

Trust.

Gratitude.

Longing.

Waiting.

Beholding Christ.

That is what walking with God looks like.

Some days the walk is joyful. Other days it feels painfully
slow. There are days when the path winds through green
pastures. There are days when it passes through the valley
of the shadow of death.

Sometimes we walk with confidence. Sometimes we limp.
Sometimes we sing. Sometimes we cry. Sometimes we have
questions with no immediate answers. Sometimes we
simply sit in silence.

The beautiful thing is that none of those seasons disqualify
us from walking with God. In fact, they often become the
very places where we discover Him most clearly.

Walking with God has never meant escaping the realities of life. It means discovering that Christ is present within them.

That is why I hope you do not finish this book and simply place it on a shelf.

Instead, return to these psalms. Pray them again. Read them slowly. Carry them into hospital rooms. Read them beside gravesides. Pray them while watching a sunrise. Whisper them when sleep will not come. Speak them over your children. Read them around your dinner table. Allow them to become part of your own vocabulary of faith.

For nearly three thousand years these songs have carried God's people because they continually carry us back to God Himself.

They have become the language of saints, martyrs, missionaries, parents, pastors, children, and weary pilgrims.

Now they become part of your story as well.

I hope you believe something profoundly hopeful. God is not finished with us.

The Holy Spirit continues to work. Every act of grace is inviting us deeper. Every hardship is an opportunity for growth. Every act of worship forms Christ within us. Every step of obedience becomes another step toward holiness.

Sanctification is simply learning to keep walking with Jesus until His life becomes increasingly visible in ours.

And one day...The walk will become sight. Faith will become reality. Hope will become fulfillment.

The tears of Psalm 42 will be wiped away forever.

The waiting of Psalm 13 will finally end.

The songs of Psalm 33 will never cease.

The thanksgiving of Psalm 116 will become endless praise.

The wonder of Psalm 8 will only deepen.

And the Beautiful King of Psalm 45 will stand before us face to face.

The Bible ends with a wedding feast. Not because history concludes with an ending. But because history reaches its home.

The Bride finally beholds her King.

Every longing is fulfilled. Every promise is completed. Every prayer finds its answer.

Until that day, we keep walking. Not because we always know where the path leads. But because we know the One who walks beside us.

So when life overwhelms you...Look up.

When anxiety grows loud...Remember His steadfast love.

When your soul grows thirsty...Come to the Living Water.

When the waiting seems endless...Trust the Gardener.

When you forget who you are...Behold the King.

And tomorrow morning...Take another step.

Then another.

And another.

For the God who has walked with His people from the very beginning is still walking with you today.

May His grace go before you. May His Spirit strengthen you. May Christ be formed within you. And may your life become a living testimony that there is no greater joy than simply...walking with God.

Amen.



About Ryan

Ryan Stratton is an ordained elder in the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, with more than twenty-five years of experience in teaching, leadership development, and over fifteen years Christian ministry.

Ryan began his career in education and formation by teaching children, adolescents, and adults across a variety of settings. During his early years, he trained extensively in Tae Kwon Do, practicing and teaching the discipline for over fifteen years.

This formative experience shaped his commitment to discipline, mentorship, and holistic personal development.

Following a call to Christian ministry and leadership, Ryan entered full-time vocational ministry, initially serving in youth ministry before transitioning into pastoral leadership. His ministry is centered on helping individuals discover a life oriented beyond self-interest, grounded in faith, purpose, and service to God and community.

Ryan earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. He later completed a Master of Divinity degree at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, where he received theological training for pastoral ministry and leadership.

In addition to his pastoral responsibilities, Ryan is an active speaker and writer (www.revryanstratton.com), contributing resources focused on discipleship, leadership, and spiritual formation. He also participates regularly in community missions and outreach initiatives.

Ryan places the highest value on his family life. He resides in Texas with his wife and their four children and prioritizes time with them alongside his professional and ministerial commitments.